

WISDOM-MAKING: A SPIRITUAL JOB DESCRIPTION FOR ELDERS

by

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A DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

Submitted to
New York Theological Seminary
in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

Bedford Hills, New York, U.S.A.

2013

ABSTRACT

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This study begins with the premise that there is different spiritual work to be done at each stage of life and that for elders, while this work is especially critical, there is little cultural or religious support for it. The purpose of this project was to design and facilitate a program that would encourage elders in life review, resulting in greater satisfaction for their remaining years. Spirituality was considered apart from religion.

The research looked at systems of human development, ancient to modern; at the process of developing one's personal myth; and at two biblical stories that show the importance of ordinary lives. The research was applied to two six-week workshops, run concurrently in urban and suburban settings, in which two groups of elders reviewed their lives to discover continuous themes, work remaining to be done, legacies to celebrate and how to use their remaining years in the most spiritually satisfying manner.

Results showed the importance of connectedness to God and/or other people, of personal storytelling, and the need to encourage and affirm elders as they engage this spiritual work. Suggestions are then given for replicating this project.

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For Peter, who would have loved growing old

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The people who have accompanied me through this doctoral work, especially the research and writing of this thesis, can hardly be thanked enough for the richness they have added to this experience for me. I am pleased to be able to name them here.

The Rev. Dr. Philip Culbertson, my advisor and friend, sat across from me at a CREDO conference when I announced that my Big Hairy Audacious Goal was—*finally*—to earn a doctorate. Little did either of us dream he would advise me on this BHAG from 3,000 miles away.

My extraordinary Site Team: Sherri Dulworth, who has been with me every step of the way, applying her considerable journalistic skills to my work and her friendship to my spirit, Dr. Robert Berson, Sister Gloria Jean Henchy, CDP, Amy Hendler, and Jamie Pfeiffer, all willingly offered their creative thinking, their practical suggestions, and their loyal and affectionate support for the year of the project.

My “consultants” and friends: Rabbi Carla Freedman and Rabbi Jo Hirschmann introduced to me to a Rebekah I would not have otherwise known; the Rev. Betsy Roadman, helped me to understand “spirituality”; Sam Deibler, who likes the company of elders as much as I do, willingly shared his wisdom with me.

My daughter and cheerleader, Christine Johannsen, took over holiday meals, repaired my eye glasses, tackled thesis formatting, and sent encouraging words when I most needed them.

The faculty members at New York Theological and Auburn Seminaries who taught me: Rabbi Justin Baird, the Rev. Dr. Dale T. Irvin and the Rev. Dr. Wanda M. Lundy, and

especially Dr. Jerry Reisig, whose font of knowledge is matched only by his ever-gracious willingness to assist.

And finally, my thirteen co-researchers willingly opened their lives to me and to each other so that we could learn together. I did not anticipate how very blessed I would be to know them.

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INTRODUCTION

*These days people seek knowledge, not wisdom.
Knowledge is of the past; wisdom is of the future.*

Vernon Cooper, Lunbee Tribe

CHALLENGE STATEMENT

In my work as a healthcare chaplain at Phelps Memorial Hospital Center, I provide pastoral care for adults from various (or no) faith traditions. My patients are mostly over 65, many suffering from spiritual dreariness and a sense of meaninglessness. Old spiritual habits no longer satisfy them and religious institutions offer little creative support. Without age-appropriate spiritual encouragement, many of these people will die spiritually long before physical death. My Demonstration Project proposes to address this situation by developing a program for spiritual awakening specifically designed for elders.

Earlier this year, my fellow Episcopal priests asked me to spend an hour describing my doctoral work to them. They knew I was working on “spirituality and aging,” but why did I consider it important? All but one of the ten around the table were parish priests, so I asked how many of them had as many elderly people as children in their congregations. Most raised their hands (which reflects a lack of children more than an abundance of elders). Then I asked how many of them had curricula and/or programs for teaching their children about our faith. All raised their hands. And how many had curricula, or discussion groups, to help the elderly deepen their spiritual lives. No hands. No surprise.

I spend time every day talking to elderly people in my work as a hospital chaplain. Some are obviously pleased when I introduce myself because having clergy visit is an honor. Most, however, are skeptical and my first task is to convince them that I’m not there either to try to sell my religion to them, or pronounce “last rites” because they’re far more seriously ill than their doctor indicated. Once past that hurdle, most patients are delighted to find that I

consider it my privilege to listen to them tell me about themselves. On the electronic medical record that I will fill out after the visit, I'll probably check "life review," but that will hardly describe the spiritual satisfaction those patients feel after they've shared a bit about who they are and what they care about, *and* how they feel about the life they've led. All I do is lean toward them, smile and nod, meet their eyes, and ask the occasional question to prompt them. They do all the work.

In the course of my introductions, I always ask if there is a clergy person or congregation they would like me to call for them. Those affiliated have usually done that already, and those not affiliated often feel the need to excuse their lack of church or synagogue membership. I let them know that it's not important to me, unless they want to discuss it. What I hear is not that they were sent away because of some comment or event or dislike of clergy or change in liturgy. Mostly, people just drifted away because there was nothing to hold them. As they aged and their religion stayed the same, it no longer met their needs. (Younger people these days often have no experience of organized religion to drift away from, but the elderly do.) The frequency of this experience makes me wonder if perhaps we outgrow religion. But it's no wonder to me that so many older people simply do not find it satisfying to attend worship anymore. They have become invisible, especially if their financial offering is minimal and they no longer serve on committees and guilds.

The above describes half of my impetus to explore the subject of spirituality and aging. Not only are the spiritual needs of elders not being addressed either within or outside of religious traditions, but our culture persists in the idea that spirituality must be attached to religion. The growing number of people who identify themselves these days as "spiritual, not

religious” as often as not use that phrase defensively rather than affirmatively. In short, there is little understanding of what spirituality is, and that needs to be addressed.

The other reason this subject calls me to delve more deeply into it is that I am an elder. As a priest, I’ve wondered in recent years where the passion for my calling had gone, that leaning toward the altar before I was ordained, yearning to be a celebrant, that joy that God had called me to this ministry, that conviction that all my life had led to this role. Perhaps it’s like a marriage that begins with eyes only for the beloved and eventually, and of necessity, steadies itself into a rhythm of loyalty, comfort, and productivity. Nevertheless, I found myself identifying with patients my age and older who remembered being actively religious, and who still walked with their Lord, but who no longer engaged in a faith community or its activities. I am one of them.

Barbara Myerhoff, the anthropologist whose book, *Number Our Days*, was foundational in the research done for this project, examined for herself what it meant to engage in research with a group you will belong to someday. Her studies to that point had been with cultures where, although she studied from within their midst, she was still an outsider and could easily maintain objective perspective. However, when she decided to take on the study of elderly Jews in a California beach community, she knew she was exploring a world that could be her own in a few years.

Working with one’s own society, and more specifically, those of one’s own ethnic and familial heritage, is perilous, and much more difficult. Yet it has a certain validity and value not available in other circumstances. Identifying with the “Other”—Indians, Chicanos, if one is Anglo, blacks if one is white, males if one is female—is an act of imagination, a means for discovering what one is not and will never be. Identifying with what one is now and will be someday is quite a different process....I would be a little old Jewish lady one day; thus, it was essential for me to learn what that condition was like, in all its particulars.¹

¹ Barbara Myerhoff, *Number Our Days* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1979), 18–19.

My reasons, then, for this project are that I saw a need that is not being met, and for the sake of elders in general, including myself, I opted to investigate. The results of that investigation are presented as follows:

The first section of three chapters is foundational, covering areas of relevant research. Chapter 1, Stages of Life, is not only a basis for the study, but a rebuttal to a cultural norm that implies that once a person leaves the workforce, he or she is no longer “productive.” Elders who absorb this erroneous premise are left feeling useless and a burden to others. In Chapter 1, I go back as far as the ancient *Vedas* produced on the Indian sub-continent about four thousand years ago. Even then, wise men (probably not women) realized that every stage of life had its own task. The *Vedas* are followed by Shakespeare, who reflected classical thought, which did not expect good things from the aging process.

Into our time, Jung had something to say about human development, and from his work, Erik Erikson developed his important Stages of Life, to which his wife, Joan Erikson, later added. Erikson’s work became the basis for other systems of human development that followed. I have included James Fowler’s Stages of Faith, also based on Erikson, but focused on the spiritual development that is the central interest of this paper.

The bones of stories and of storytelling are the subject of Chapter 2, “The Importance of Our Stories.” What is the Family Narrative and how does it impact the Personal Myth we eventually develop? At what point do we stop writing our myth and begin reviewing it? As with Stages of Life, there is a natural progression here with specific work appointed for elders.

Chapter 3, “Lesser Children of the One God,” examines the biblical legacy and storytelling. Neither Rebekah nor Mary Magdalene was a major biblical character; each was

merely the female companion of a man who was important to the story. And yet, the story we inherit would not have been the same without them. In God's greater plan, every life counts, even the quiet patient in a hospital bed who doesn't think anyone cares that she's there.

Part II includes the chapters that deal with the doctoral project itself, beginning with Chapter 4, "Implementation of the Project." This chapter discusses the methods used to conduct the project, describing especially the process of heuristic research. Chapter 5 locates the project in specific settings, from the hospital where the need made itself obvious, to Kendal on Hudson and Morningside Gardens where the two project groups were carried out.

Chapter 6 deals only with definitions of "spirituality" because coming to some mutual understanding of the word was crucial in the workshops. The word is so overused that its meaning has been diluted, yet there is nothing quite adequate to replace it. This chapter presents definitions I have found useful within the project groups, and the responses of elders themselves when asked, "What is spirituality?"

Chapters 7, "Wisdom-Making: The Workshops" and Chapter 8, "The Participants: Before and After," present the workshops and the participants. Chapter 7 discusses each workshop, session by session, and how the topics of discussion were received and used. The following chapter presents the participants' written responses to surveys, both before and after the workshops.

Chapter 9 is my evaluation of the workshops: what worked, what clearly did not work, what was changed from the model proposed, and how to replicate this project in the future. Chapter 10, "Competencies," presents the outcome of the four competencies I chose to work on, with the help of my Site Team. And finally, Chapter 11, "Conclusion,"

summarizes what was learned and the transformation of this researcher and her co-researchers in the course of the project.

I began this project convinced that God created us to live fully and grow until the moment of our death. I hope this research will contribute to a wider understanding of the growth that is possible for elders, the growth that is particularly spiritual in later years, the growth that, in fact, is required to complete the *imago dei* that is our heritage.

CHAPTER 1 STAGES OF LIFE

*Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand Who saith "A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!"*

—Robert Browning, “*Rabbi Ben Ezra*”

From the ancient *Vedas*, written millennia before the common era, to the twentieth century writings of Jung, Erikson, Fowler and others and into the present, observers of human development have put forth systems of stages to describe the growth of human beings from birth to death. The growth these writings described was not just physical, but psycho-social, emotional, and spiritual. This chapter will describe the stages of life as they are understood in a variety of cultural systems: the ancient *Vedas*, which has impacted a people for 4,000 years, Shakespeare reflecting on classical Greek culture, Jung, the Eriksons—arguably among the most influential in modern theories of human development—and James Fowler, who looks at faith development through Erikson’s lens.

The study of these lists of stages is relevant to this project because first of all, they demonstrate that spiritual/emotional/psychological growth continues from birth until death. Secondly, except for Shakespeare’s cynicism, they offer a surprisingly similar illustration of what can be healthy and satisfying for those 70 and older,² if they choose to continue their growth and move into those final stages. I began (and end) this project with the conviction

² I began by arbitrarily choosing 65 as the beginning of “elderhood,” but quickly found that in our culture, people were no longer routinely retiring at 65, nor thinking of themselves as “elderly.” Seventy seems a more logical, if still arbitrary, age to begin this late phase of life.

that our culture is indifferent to the spiritual needs of adults in the final, or penultimate stage of life, and yet the following descriptions of stages of life (again, excepting Shakespeare) indicate that these last stages are vital in order to complete a life. I would go so far as to say that elders who do not engage in the spiritual work of these final stages of reflection and integration also never reach the wisdom that we automatically attribute to them by virtue of age.

THE VEDAS / HINDUISM

In the complex way of life that is Hinduism, various lists and systems are woven together, each supporting the others, and all of it based on the ancient *Vedas*, the writings that grew out of the melding of the incoming Aryan peoples with the indigenous people of the Indian subcontinent somewhere around 2,000 BCE.³ Even that long ago, the sages and writers of the *Vedas* understood the need to make plain the changing roles of a man from birth to death.

Hinduism is a way of life more than it is a religion. Categorizing it as a religion was a twentieth-century innovation imposed on Hindus from outside their own culture. Even the word “spirituality,” introduced by the English, made no sense because in the Hindu mind, the life of the spirit, including its religious practice, cannot be separated from the rest of life. In fact, the Hindi word for spirituality, *adhyatmik*, literally means “concerning the self.”⁴

³ Klaus K. Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 336. “Hindus possess an irresistible urge to classify and to organize everything into neat and logical patterns. The number 4 serves not only to classify the Veda (into four *samhitās* and into four classes of books considered Veda in the wider sense) and to divide humanity into basic sections (castes), but also to structure the life of individuals themselves. The successive stages of life of a high-caste person were correlated to another tetrad, the ‘four aims of life’ (*dharma*, moral law; *artha*, material goods; *karma*, enjoyment; and *moksha*, liberation.”

⁴ Sarasvati Chennakesavan, *A Critical Study of Hinduism* (Delhi, India: P.S. Jayasinghe, 1974), 315.

The Hindu's ties to Brahman, the one Ultimate Reality, rest upon how he or she lives life. And the quality of how life is lived depends on the rules for a Hindu's station in life (once called *caste*). Before discussing the Hindu *ashrama*, the Stages of Life that are relevant to this study, it is important to understand the Four Goals of life, because each of the Stages has a different obligation to the Goals.

It is also important to note that for the Hindu, "the path of salvation, of complete liberation of the soul, is two-fold: renunciation both of all things of the world and involvement in society."⁵ Contradictory as these two ideals may seem, when understood in the context of the Four Goals and the Four Stages of Life, they make great sense.

The Four Goals (*purushartha*)

- *Dharma* is righteousness, the law, the inner characteristic of a thing that makes it what it is. A Hindu must follow *dharma* according to his station (caste) and his stage of life.
- *Artha*, the second objective, is the pursuit of pleasure, wealth, and material goods.
- *Karma* is described both as "enjoyment" and as "duty." It is the result of action and contains the law of cause and effect. One's *karma* accumulates over *all* of one's lifetimes.
- Finally, *moksha* is liberation, the renunciation of all things of the world.⁶

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ V. Krishnamurthy, *Essentials of Hinduism* (New Delhi, India: Narosa Publishing House, 1989), 15.

The Stages of Life⁷

- *Brahmacari* is the student. Depending on his caste, this stage is entered by ritual at age seven or eight. The *brahmacari* lives an austere life, studying with his *guru* (teacher), usually living in the *guru*'s home the entire time. He will both learn from the writings of his people and develop the skills he needs to enter the second stage, that of a householder. This stage concludes, as it began, with ritual (not unlike our graduation ceremonies). The *purushartha* (goal) to be followed at this stage is *dharma*.
- The *grhastha*, the householder, lives out his obligations to his ancestors, his family and his community. He is expected to rise in his profession, be visible and active in his community, produce children, worship the gods as befits his caste, enjoy sex and other pleasures and gain wealth (necessary to support all the other stages for himself and his family). The *purushartha* to be followed are *dharma*, *karma*, and *artha*.
- The third stage, *vanaprastha*, is often called the *forest-dweller* because, ideally, the person leaves home and goes to a place conducive to the work of this stage. The signal for entry into this stage is described in various ways: when a man celebrates the birth of his first grandchild, when his youngest son becomes a householder, or when he sees his hair turn grey. The *purushartha* to be followed now are *dharma* and, for the first time, *moksha*, the abandoning of worldly things. One scholar describes it as a form of continuing education:

⁷ Jessica Frazier, ed., *The Continuum Companion to Hindu Studies* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 27. The Stages of Life only applied to upper-caste males, those known as "twice born" who have undergone certain prescribed rituals. Women are simply expected to be good daughters, wives and mothers, supporting both husband and son in their worldly lives and the eventual pursuit of liberation.

But there comes a third stage in each person's life when one looks back in retrospect and discovers that maybe there are other things in life which should now be sought if they have not been already sought. So again a learning process starts and the earlier race for the glamour of material happiness does not appear so significant now.⁸

- And finally, the fourth and last stage is the *sannyasa*, the one who practices only *moksha*, renunciation, toward the goal of liberation. One carries the weight of *karma* into this stage, and the purpose of this stage is to release it, to release anything that one has become attached to, even, and perhaps especially, the self. The ultimate goal, reached in this life or in some future life, is to end the cycle of rebirths by relinquishing all attachments and becoming one with Brahman.

Separation and poverty are not required for this stage:

...when the scriptures say “be detached” they mean “have a detached attitude.” It is the attitude that matters, not the physical act of renunciation.... The attitude of detachment here means that one does not make any egoistic claim for one's actions. The effort should be to overcome the anxious desire which always follows attachment, to overcome the anger that is a natural consequence of the non-fulfillment of that desire and to overcome the delusion and confusion of intellect which is only one step beyond anger. If a man can go about his duties for the sake of duty and not claim authorship, ownership or doership for himself, he will not be subject to the experience of resultant pleasure or pain. Neither the good results nor the bad results of his actions would bind him. So long as any action binds him, he has to return to the cycle of *samsara* (the cycle of birth–death–rebirth).⁹

This last stage seems to be more rarified than the other three, which easily compare to cycles lived out in most modern cultures (childhood/education; marriage/profession/family;

⁸ Krishnarmurth, 13.

⁹ Robin Rinehard, ed. *Contemporary Hinduism: Ritual, Culture, and Practice* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2001), 40–41.

retirement). One writer notes that few men actually attain this stage and those who are drawn to it usually begin renouncing the world much earlier in their lives.¹⁰

These stages were laid out millennia ago and while embedded in Hindu thought today, they are no longer practiced in any formal way. What once suited the needs of the times no longer does so, at least not in a formal way.

One clever Hindu writer even compared these stages to a typical day:

It can be suggested that the four stages of life resemble the typical day of a spiritual person: In the morning, one reads the scriptures for insight and preparation for the day. During the day, one goes about the business of earning a living, keeping the house, participating in the community. In the evening, one winds down, reflecting on the day. At the end of the day, one prays and lets go of the day in order to sleep. Within the Hindu tradition sleep has been described as daily death (*dainandinam maranam*)!¹¹

However, it is the wisdom of these stages that will carry through these pages, the idea that there are particular goals, actions and roles to be played at different times of life: learning, producing, retiring, relinquishing, growing and changing from birth to death.

SHAKESPEARE (1564–1616)

Vedic writings may be the oldest recorded system of life stages, but the idea of dividing a man's, and it was usually the male lifespan considered,¹² life into stages continued to fascinate writers. While there could be any number of stages, the number seven, with its perceived mystical associations, is credited to Hippocrates and was still in common use by Shakespeare's time.¹³ Hippocrates' system (infant, child, boy, youth, man, elderly, old) was

¹⁰ Ibid., 24.

¹¹ Arvind Shama, *Hinduism for Our Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 48–49.

¹² John Bartlett, *A Complete Concordance to Shakespeare* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 1109–10. Shakespeare uses "old man" 68 times versus his eight uses of "old woman."

¹³ Irving Ribner and George Lyman Kittredge, eds., *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1971), 371n.

slightly adjusted by Shakespeare in what is arguably the most widely known expression of human life stages, from *As You Like It*.

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. At first, the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.
And then the whining school-boy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lined,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloons,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.
"As You Like It," (2.7.138–165)

CARL GUSTAV JUNG (1875–1961)

Jung was a Swiss psychoanalyst whose contributions to psychological understanding include analytical psychology, archetypes, the collective unconscious, and the concept of introverted and extraverted personalities (on which the widely-used Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is based).

Less known are his ideas about the human stages of life. For Jung, every stage has its own mission and success or failure directly impacted on the stages that followed. Unlike Shakespeare and the *Vedic* writers, Jung and those who followed assumed both men and women as subjects.

Jung's stages can be briefly described as follows.¹⁴

- *Childhood* (birth to puberty): In this stage, the ego emerges and begins to develop, and while the child is dependent, the sense of self emerges. The archetype Jung used for this stage is the Athlete, the person acutely aware of his or her own body.
- *Adolescence and Early Adulthood* (puberty until 35–40): In this stage, a person moves away from parental dictates and learns to make personal choices (relationship, vocation, social role). The myths we have carried with us are now lined up against the reality of experience. Joseph Campbell described this stage as a “heroic journey,” but it can be bypassed by adhering to a belief system (religious, familiar, social group) that will influence, if not dictate, our choices. The real journey through this stage, however, is experience.
- *Mid-Life* (40–60): Now the choices of the second stage come under scrutiny as the person begins the process of reevaluating him/herself. Society may call this a “midlife crisis” as the person tries to go back to make different choices. Or the person may understand what Peggy Lee was asking when she sang “Is That All There Is?” Challenges are posed, questions asked, and if the ego is open to and honest with answers, this stage can be a rebirth.
- *Old Age* (60 and over): If the tasks of the first three stages have been accomplished,

¹⁴ Robert L. Johnson, “Jung and 4 Stages of Life,” Tallahassee Center for Jungian Studies. Jungian.info/Library.cfm?idsLibrary=29 (Accessed September 15–October 7, 2012).

one has nothing to prove in this stage. If that work has not been done, an elderly person can live with regret for what might have been, anger at what others have inflicted as well as at the fast approach of death, or be indifferent to life now that it is no longer “productive.” Johnson interprets Jung as designating *wisdom* as the ideal of this age. One has learned from parents, from experience, from reevaluating choices, and now can offer back the wisdom gleaned from experience. Or not. The healthy elder no longer needs other people for validation. He or she is an observer now, making connections heretofore impossible to see.

Like the *Vedas* long before him, and like Erikson after him, Jung believed that humans continued to develop throughout their lives, with the success or failure of each stage impacting on the stages that followed. And each was important, even old age.

A human being would certainly not grow to be seventy or eighty years old if this longevity had no meaning for the species to which he belongs. The afternoon of human life must also have a significance of its own and cannot be merely a pitiful appendage to life’s morning.... Whoever carries over into the afternoon the law of the morning—that is, the aims of nature—must pay for so doing with damage to his soul just as surely as a growing youth who tries to salvage his childish egoism must pay for this mistake with social failure.¹⁵

A story from Jung’s own later years is a sweet illustration of his theory in practice.

Once a strange thing happened. Jung broke off dictating a rather inconsequential letter and began to talk. Already after the first words it was as if a curtain had been lifted before the world, as if the whole fabric of creation had become transparent and everything that happened was absolutely understandable. Connections sprang up between the remotest spheres. I cannot express it otherwise than that I shared a moment of illumination.¹⁶

¹⁵ C.G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1934).

¹⁶ Aniela Jaffe, *From the Life and Work of C.G. Jung*, R.F.C. Hull, trans. (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 125.

ERIK H. ERIKSON (1902–1994) and JOAN M. ERIKSON (1902–1997)

In 1950, developmental psychologist Eric H. Erikson published his *Childhood and Society*, the seventh chapter of which was entitled, “Eight Ages of Man.”¹⁷ It became, and remains, foundational for studies of human development that would come later. His categories using his original language, and in parenthesis the more commonly used vocabulary later applied to it, are as follows:

1. Oral–Sensory (Infancy): Basic Trust vs. Mistrust

The quality of the infant’s relationship with the mother/caregiver determines the child’s level of trust or mistrust. If the infant’s needs are met reliably and affectionately, the child will develop a sense of trust. Lack of this will engender mistrust.¹⁸

2. Muscular–Anal (Early Childhood): Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt

With greater control of muscles, the child begins to exercise autonomy and at the same time, struggles with being cooperative and submissive versus being assertive and willful. If autonomy meets with excessive disapproval, shame, rage and doubt develop.

3. Locomotor–Genital (Play Age): Initiative vs. Guilt

Now the child begins to assert control over the environment, curious but not always appropriate in his explorations. Successful initiatives encourage a sense of power and control, but guilt is experienced when those endeavors are met with lack of success or excessive disapproval.

4. Latency (School Age): Industry vs. Inferiority

In the new social environment of school, the child learns to apply skills to tasks and to

¹⁷ Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 2nd Edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1963), 247–69.

¹⁸ Summaries of Erikson’s stages were gleaned from a variety of sources, but primarily from Donald Capps, *Life Cycle Theory and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 1–31.

achieve goals, wanting to be industrious and successful at assigned tasks. When the child is not successful, her skills not appreciated, her social status among her peers not secure, a sense of inferiority develops.

5. Puberty and Adolescence (Adolescence): Identity vs. Role Confusion

This is the stage at which a person develops a sense of self, repudiating some old selves, consolidating a new self and identifying with groups of similar people. Failure to accomplish this results in role confusion.

6. Young Adulthood: Intimacy vs. Isolation

In this stage, the young adult needs to form intimate, loving relationships, made easier if he brings a strong sense of self into relationship. Failure to achieve such relationships leads to isolation.

7. Adulthood: Generativity vs. Stagnation

Concern for the next generation and a legacy that will live on after oneself is the work of this stage, which includes producing children, benefiting the culture, needing to be needed, and giving of oneself. Failure to do this—Erikson uses the term “self-indulgent”—results in a “sense of stagnation and interpersonal impoverishment.”¹⁹

8. Maturity (Mature Adulthood): Integrity vs. Despair and Disgust

In this last of Erikson’s stages, a person accepts her life and understands that she has been responsible for it. It is not only a process of personal evaluation, satisfaction, and completion, but also integration with those who have gone before. Death is a reality now; it cannot be denied or put aside, but with integrity comes a hope that death will be the next stage. The negative aspect of this stage is disgust with what has been, including blame and shame, and

¹⁹ Erikson, 267.

fear of death as a termination, a blotting out. Erikson worried, even in the 1950s, that with longevity increasing in our society, there would be more and more people living in despair.

It is important to note that for Erikson, in a normal life span we *will* progress through all the stages. *How* we progress is the question for him. Psychologically and emotionally, each stage after the first builds on the stage(s) before it. Lack of trust in infancy will affect one's ability to trust throughout life. That does not mean, however, that the optimum for each stage is only the positive pole. The ability to mistrust what is not trustworthy is vital for survival throughout life.²⁰ Thus Erikson's Stages of Life are a process for a complete life, each stage meshing with the other stages.

Erikson's stages became foundational for his own and other behavioral theorists after its publication, and in 1982, he published *The Life Cycle Completed*, the last book he would write alone. In the preface he writes, "In this essay, I go further and begin my account of the stages with the last one, *old age*, to see how much sense a re-view of the *completed* life cycle can make of its whole course."²¹

And yet, Erikson and his wife, Joan M. Erikson, would find that the stages were still not complete. In a preface to the *Extended Version* of the book, Joan Erikson writes that initially, they only had seven stages. They had noted that Shakespeare had skipped over an entire stage—that of the child at play. She describes how, on a drive to the train that would take Erik to a conference at which he would present his stages, they realized that they, too, had left out a stage:

Sitting with the life cycle chart on my lap while Erik drove, I began to feel uneasy. Shakespeare had seven stages, as did we, and he had omitted an

²⁰ Donald Capps, *Life Cycle Theory and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 20.

²¹ Erik H. Erikson and Joan M. Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed: Extended Version with New Chapters on the Ninth Stage of Development* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 20.

important one. Had we too left one out? In a shocking moment of clarity I saw what was wrong: “We” were missing, and so were the children and Erik’s new book *Children and Society*. The seven chart stages jumped from ‘Intimacy’ (stage six) to ‘Old Age’ (stage seven). We surely needed another stage between the sixth and seventh, but time was short. Soon we included a new seventh stage entitled “Generativity vs. Stagnation,” followed by “Old Age” with the strengths of wisdom and integrity promoted to the eighth stage.²²

But then, in her 90s, after Erik’s death, but equipped with his copious notes and criticisms of the first edition of the book, she realized that a ninth stage was needed. She called it only “The Ninth Stage,” and described it essentially as a necessary second phase of the original Stage Eight, which she felt did not cover enough of the physical and psychological phenomena of people in their nineties—of which there were increasing numbers.

Erikson had also, after the original publication of the stages, affixed virtues to each stage.²³ Joan Erikson continued the virtue of Stage Seven, Wisdom, into the Ninth Stage. In this stage, however, the elder deals with great loss: of physical capacity, of friends and family, and of independence. In many cultures, including our own, elders are put aside, isolated, their physical liabilities often interpreted as mental deficiency. But if one can cope with this, it is possible to enter a stage that she reports in her chapters as “gerotranscendence.”

First presented by Lars Tornstam at Uppsala Universitet, Sweden, gerotranscendence refers to

a shift in meta perspective, from a materialistic and rational vision to a more cosmic and transcendent one, normally followed by an increase in life satisfaction. ...the gerotranscendent individual experiences a new feeling of cosmic communion with the spirit of the universe, a redefinition of time, space,

²² Ibid., 3.

²³ Capps, 38. Stage I: Hope; II: Will; III: Purpose; IV: Competence; V: Fidelity; VI: Love; VII: Care; VIII: Wisdom.

life and death, and a redefinition of the self. This individual might also experience a decrease in interest in material things and a greater need for solitary “meditation.”²⁴

If we now look at the Eriksons’ Stage Eight and the Ninth Stage, they bear a remarkable resemblance to the third and fourth Life Stages of the *Vedas*: first leaving the life of the householder who is deeply involved in community, then moving to the forest for quiet reflection, eventually relinquishing all hold on earthly things to become part of the Ultimate Reality of Brahman. For the Hindu, success at this last stage reduces or eliminates rebirth; for the Western mind, “death becomes syntonetic, the way of all living things.”^{25 26}

JAMES W. FOWLER (b. 1940)

While Fowler built upon the foundation of Erikson’s stages,²⁷ the Stages of Faith he described differ in several significant ways. First, while they also involve psycho-social growth, they specifically address faith. Secondly, while Erikson’s stages would be complete in a lifetime not shortened by early death, many people would not complete Fowler’s stages. In fact, he acknowledged that some adults never get past the first two or three and very few reach the last stage. And finally, while Erikson formulated eight stages (with an additional ninth added by Joan Erikson), Fowler skipped over infancy and then presented six stages.

²⁴ Lars Tornstam, “Gerotranscendence: A Theoretical and Empirical Exploration,” in L.E. Thomas and S.A. Eisenhandler, eds. *Aging and the Religious Dimension* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1993). Included in *The Life Cycle Completed: Extended Version*, 123–24.

²⁵ Joan M. Erikson, 124.

²⁶ Joan Erikson reports searching for the root meaning of “wisdom” and finding it in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Vol. X, 192). “This small root is *veda* ‘to see, to know.’”

²⁷ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 38–39. Fowler acknowledges that he built on the foundation not only of Erikson’s stages, but on Jean Piaget’s work on cognitive development and Lawrence Kohlberg’s work on moral development.

Fowler understood faith to be different from belief or religion.²⁸ He called it

the most fundamental category in the human quest for relation to transcendence. Faith, it appears, is generic, a universal feature of human living, recognizably similar everywhere despite the remarkable variety of forms and contents of religious practice and belief.²⁹

His stages are as follows:

Stage 0 - Primal/Infancy: precedes Fowler's stages.

Stage 1 - Intuitive-Projective: For the preschool child, fantasy and reality are tangled, magical thinking is common and the child's beliefs about God and religion come from the parents and social group.

Stage 2-Mythic-Literal: The young school-age child is capable of more logical thinking, but still sees the world in concrete black and white. He accepts the stories of faith presented by those in authority and understands them literally.

Stage 3-Synthetic-Conventional: The adolescent, who is beginning to think abstractly and independently, starts to break away from the formerly acceptable thinking imposed upon her as a child. She now seeks to find a group that values her emerging beliefs. While it is possible for an adult to stay stuck in Stage 2, it is more common for adults in our culture to never progress past Stage 3.

Stage 4-Individuative-Reflective: The young adult is now critically examining his beliefs and may reject much of what he believed before—a process that turns some people away from faith or religion altogether. He is consumed at this stage with defining himself personally,

²⁸ Anne Anderson, "James Fowler's Stages of Faith." Unitarian Universalist Church of Palo Alto, www.uucpa.org/sermons_00-01/sermon010107.html (accessed October 6–7, 2012). "Fowler defines faith, not necessarily as faith in God or the creed of a particular religion. Faith, to Fowler, is that which gives meaning to one's life, that which motivates and explains an individual's view of the world. Faith for one individual may center on financial success, on relationship, on power, on agnosticism or atheism. He does, however, state that those individuals who attain the later stages know a spiritual dimension which anchors their faith and their actions."

²⁹ Fowler, 14.

professionally, and socially, moving away now from being dependent on exterior influences. As he works on examining, accepting, and rejecting beliefs, he is quite capable of becoming fixed in the conclusions he forms. At this age/stage, he knows everything!

Stage 5–Conjunctive Faith: There is a movement from arrogance to humility here as the midlife adult discovers that every question may have more than one right answer. She can accept, even welcome, paradox and mystery. Life has taught her well and she is comfortable with the reality that others believe differently than she does. In fact, her own beliefs are more open to new ideas and experiences than ever before in her life. She can accept the “wisdom evolved in things as they are, before seeking to modify, control or order them to fit prior categories.”³⁰

Stage 6–Universalizing Faith: Few adults reach this stage, which is marked by selflessness, and compassion for and connection to all beings. They tend to disturb the status quo around them and as Fowler states, “so frequently become martyrs for the visions they incarnate.”³¹

Within Fowler’s stages, one can move forward and backward. The ever-maturing faith will continue to move forward, but not without moments of slipping back to an earlier stage in a particular situation. I can be a Jew who easily reconciles Genesis 1 and 2 with evolutionary science, but who stands firm and stubborn about the Exodus occurring exactly as stated in scripture. Or I can be a Christian open to accepting the Virgin Birth as mythological, but convinced the Resurrection happened exactly as it has been passed down to me in scripture, family, and church.

CONCLUSIONS

With the exception of Shakespeare’s negative “second childishness and mere

³⁰ Ibid., 185

³¹ Ibid., 200.

oblivion,” the sources above are all quite clear that the last stages of life have unique tasks and conditions. In different ways, each points to a time of physical rest and active reflection, a time of openness and connectedness to the creation, a time when the spirit takes precedence over the mind and body.

The *Vedas* call for one to physically leave the work of the householder and live somewhere else, engaging the process of reflection before finally, in the last stage, relinquishing all connections. Jung sees the last stage of life, for him 60 and over, as a time to observe, to re-evaluate and connect—assuming the work of the previous stages has been done. Erik Erikson saw the eighth stage as a time of reflection and closure, and in Joan Erikson’s Ninth Stage, a “gerotranscendence” that joins one with the cosmos and provides ultimate satisfaction. For Fowler as well, the final and highest stage of faith is marked by openness, selflessness, and connection to all being.

Jung and Erikson see *wisdom* as the product of old age and a benefit to be passed on to those who come after. Fowler posits that in Stage 5, one appreciates “the wisdom of all things as they are.”

The next chapter, “The Importance of Stories,” again describes a progression through life, but this time, in the form of a story, the “personal myth” that we develop during our lives, and review in our old age.

CHAPTER 2 THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR STORIES

*Our story isn't a file of photographs
faces laughing under green leaves
or snowlit doorways, on the verge of driving
away, our story is not about women
victoriously perched on the one
sunny day of the conference,
nor lovers displaying love.*

*Our story is of moments
when even slow motion moved too fast
for the shutter of the camera:
words that blew our lives apart, like so,
eyes that cut and caught each other,
mime of the operating room
where gas and knives quote each other
moments before the telephone
starts ringing: our story is
how still we stood,
how fast.*

Adrienne Rich, "For An Album"

At the edge of the Catskill Mountains in New York, in the town of Hudson near the shore of the river, a large modern nursing home takes excellent care of dozens of elderly people who actually looked forward to living there. It appears to be a typical modern nursing home with state-of-the-art care provided by a professional staff in a facility designed to make life as easy as possible for its elderly residents. The Firemen's Home is owned and operated by the Firemen's Association of the State of New York. Built originally to house indigent volunteer fire fighters in 1895, the Firemen's Home is today a Mecca for men and women

who served their local communities as volunteer fire fighters and now need assisted living. As is common in such facilities, there are multiple choices of organized activities to fill the days. There are card tables and chessboards, jigsaw puzzle tables, and a well-stocked library. But the reason most of the residents want to live there and not someplace else is for what they do when they get together. They tell stories. And they listen to each other's stories. No one but another fire fighter can understand the danger, the pride and satisfaction, the camaraderie, and the commitment of a fire fighter except others who have shared that experience. They all did other things in their lives, but being a volunteer fire fighter is a paramount piece of their identities and many of them have the jackets and baseball caps to prove it.

A bit further south on the Hudson is the Veterans' Home in Montrose, New York where swapping "war stories" takes up a lot of time for these elderly warriors. Some of them are unburdening themselves of stories they've kept inside for decades, especially the World War II vets who came home to a country bent on putting the war behind it and building its future.

In addition to residences that serve people with common experience, there are groups whose task it is to capture and preserve life stories. Some specialize in recording the stories of witnesses to seminal events such as the Holocaust, or the Ku Klux Klan and the lynching of black men in the American South. Other groups such as StoryCorps are not choosy about whose story they preserve. The mission of StoryCorps, since its founding in 2003, has been to "provide Americans of all backgrounds and beliefs with the opportunity to record, share, and preserve the stories of our lives." This not-for-profit organization is nationwide and mobile, going where the stories are to capture them for the storytellers and for the culture.

We do this to remind one another of our shared humanity, strengthen and build the connections between people, teach the value of listening, and weave into the fabric of our culture the understanding that every life matters. At the same time, we will create an invaluable archive of American voices and wisdom for future generations.³²

For those who can write or can afford a ghostwriter, memoirs are *de rigueur*. The New York Times Non-Fiction Bestseller List generally lists several every week, and there's no shortage of how-to books or half-day workshops on memoir writing. We are obsessed with personal storytelling these days, and not only life stories but daily details. With modern technology, people can tell their stories day-by-day, or minute-by-minute if they so choose. Witness the popularity of Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and the ubiquitous cell phone.

Telling our stories has become a national pastime and that is not at all a bad thing. For the elderly person, it is, in fact, a *necessary* task. It is the work of wisdom-making and the prerequisite to a sense of peace about a life well lived.

This chapter will discuss the way we develop our personal stories and how we need to complete them near the end of our lives.

THE STORY WE INHERIT: THE FAMILY NARRATIVE

Even before we're born, a family narrative exists that will include us, inform us, and identify us—to some extent for our entire life. Pastoral theologian Philip Culbertson places “family narratives” as the first of “three classes of stories that shape human identity.”³³ Families convey numerous interwoven tales about their history to their newborns—and offer that narrative to anyone proposing to join the family. (Typical “in-law” greeting cards say something like this: “So glad *you're* part of *our* family. You're as peculiar as we are!”) The

³² StoryCorp: Every Voice Matters. About Us. www.StoryCorps.org/about/ (accessed January 3–24, 2013).

³³ Philip Culbertson, *Caring for God's People* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 49. The three classes are Family Narratives, Self-Defining Narratives, and Intersubjective Narratives.

family narrative is woven of many threads: its history, its characters, and the ethnic identity that ties the family to a larger national or religious group, the family's location, and its socio-economic status. Like a family crest, this powerful narrative binds family members together—whether they like it or not—and identifies the family to outsiders.

For instance, a child born in the post-war years to an Irish-Catholic family in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, New York grows up with the story of her grandparents' immigration to America, and she will have ties to the "old sod" whether or not she ever sets foot on Ireland's shores. She will understand there are other "nationalities," but all are inferior to the Irish. If she needs help, she would go to another Irish family, not to the Italians, the Polish, the Germans or the Jews, although they may be very nice people. (Post-war Brooklyn was racially segregated. The "diversity" of white neighborhoods was European in origin.) Family members may or may not go to church on Sunday—the women almost certainly do, but it's optional for the men—but they espouse the Ten Commandments and the superiority of the Catholic Church. You learn the details of your family narrative from listening to your aunts as they gossip, or your grandparents argue, or the content of the prayers you pray with your parents before you go to bed. Your food is Irish, your songs are Irish, and St. Patrick's Day is second only to Christmas among holidays. When someone asks, as people did in post-war Brooklyn, "What are you?", you need only say "Irish" and that is sufficient.

Culbertson points out, however, that some stories exert their power by not being spoken.³⁴ For instance, Uncle Willie begins every day with a shot of whiskey and Uncle Bobby spends his evenings at the bar around the corner, but there are no alcoholics in the family. The word alcoholic is never used except to refer to the alcoholics in *other* families.

³⁴ Ibid., 50.

Like other forms of history, the family narrative is not necessarily Truth, but truth as the family members understand it to be, both spoken and unspoken.

Elizabeth Stone notes the permanent impact of these family stories:

All of us, long after we've left our original families, keep at least some of these stories with us, and they continue to matter, but sometimes in new ways. ... We are always in conversation with them, one way or another.³⁵

The family narrative is the foundation upon which the personal myth is built. In childhood, in what McAdams terms the *premythic* phase of infancy and childhood, there is no interest in finding meaning or purpose in life. The child inherits the family narrative and lives within it, repeating it, accepting it, but all the while gathering information that will be used later in the development of the *personal myth*.

THE STORY WE DEVELOP: THE PERSONAL MYTH:

The personal myth, as Dan P. McAdams calls it, begins to develop in late adolescence when the young adult seeks to develop his own story, separate from the family narrative. Personal ideology begins to take shape at this age, establishing a setting for the myth: Who am I and what do I stand for? This is the *mythic* stage.

During one's twenties and thirties, the years when one is establishing a place in society—raising a family, building a career—the myth naturally focuses on the many faces of oneself. McAdams notes that making peace among our various “imagoes,” or personae within our personal myths “is a hallmark of mature identity in the middle-adult years.”³⁶ How does one integrate being a parent, a spouse, a professional, a man or a woman, a citizen, a friend, and not least, an individual?

³⁵ Elizabeth Stone, *Black Sheep and Kissing Cousins: How Our Family Stories Shape Us* (New York: Times Books, 1988), 8.

³⁶ Dan P. McAdams, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1993), 35–37.

Only later in adulthood, as we become aware that life is probably half over and the myth will someday come to an end, do we become more concerned with our legacy. The attention now is not only on ourselves, what McAdams calls “agency,” but on “communion,” our role within the community. What will we contribute to its greater good? What is our legacy?³⁷ McAdams calls this “generativity,” an idea he carried forward from Erikson.

The generativity script is an adult’s plan for what he or she hopes to do in the future to leave a heroic gift for the next generation. We recast and revise our own life stories so that the past is seen as giving birth to the present and the future, and so that beginning, middle, and end make sense in terms of each other. A legacy of the self is generated and offered up to others as the middle-aged adult comes to realize, in the words of Erik Erikson, that “I am what survives me.”³⁸

Underlying the desire for generativity is the deeper yearning for immortality. Rationally, we know our lives must end, but spiritually, we desperately hope that we will live on in *this* world, at least in what we leave behind. More than the passing on of our DNA through our children, our legacy is the gift of our accomplishments, our ideas, all that we have done to make the world a better place. This we offer to those who follow us.

Although this brief description of the development of our personal myths implies that it is straightforward, there are numerous bumps on the myth-making road. Slants on the news, gratuitous gaps, and selective memory all contribute to the end product of our personal story, as Jonathan Gottschall describes it.

A life story is a personal myth about who we are deep down—where we come from, how we got this way, and what it all means. Our life stories are who we are. They are our identity. A life story is not, however, an objective account. A life story is a carefully shaped narrative that is replete with strategic forgetting and skillfully spun meanings.

³⁷ Ibid., 277.

³⁸ Ibid., 227.

Like any published memoir, our own life stories should also come with a disclaimer: “This story that I tell about myself is only *based* on a true story. I am in large part a figment of my own yearning imagination.”³⁹

The third phase in McAdams’ scheme, what he calls *postmythic*, is the elder years when the end of the story is almost in sight. Now the work is not about developing and refining the myth, but about examining it—what clinicians call “life review.” Referring back to the eighth stage of Erikson’s Stages of Life: Integrity vs. Despair, McAdams suggests that the myth is now a gift to *ourselves*, to value or not. “To experience integrity is to accept the myth with grace. To experience despair is to reject the myth as unworthy.”⁴⁰

Erikson points out that should the myth be unacceptable, one is burdened with sorrow that is compounded by the fact that there is no time left to rewrite it. “Despair expresses the feeling that the time is now short, too short for the attempt to start another life and to try out alternate roads.”⁴¹ The experience of looking at one’s life story, as God looked at each day of creation, and neither being able to pronounce it “Good” nor having the time to mend what was broken can be devastating. David O. Moberg, a researcher in spirituality and aging, notes that dwelling on what *might* have been if different choices had been made may actually obliterate memories of what worked well, what was accomplished, and what benefitted others.

Reminiscence can be destructive to mental health if it involves brooding or obsessing on past negatives and prevents the elder from moving on.... Dwelling in the past can be used defensively to avoid taking responsibility and making needed changes in the here and now.⁴²

³⁹ Jonathan Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), 161–62.

⁴⁰ McAdams, 279.

⁴¹ Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 269.

⁴² David O. Moberg, *Aging and Spirituality: Spiritual Dimensions of Aging Theory, Research, Practice and Policy* (New York: The Haworth Pastoral Press, 2001), 160–61.

What happens if one's personal myth is unacceptable? If it does not match the realities of the life actually lived? Culbertson writes that those who seek counseling may be dealing with what he calls "narrative dissonance."

...their narratives do not match either their affective or their lived experience, or because there are significant aspects of their emotional or behavioral history that contradict the dominant narrative they are attempting to maintain.⁴³

The need to review our stories, to forgive what is unacceptable, to reconcile where it is possible, to find meaning for our lives, to offer our gifts: this is the spiritual work of the elder. To take bits of information and convert them to wisdom, and then, ideally, to share them, to be the storyteller of our life. McAdams again: "The last facet of generativity is narration."⁴⁴

One of the first things Barbara Myerhoff realized in her study of elderly Jews was the desperation they had to be seen and heard. Among themselves there was constant competition to speak and be heard, and as they accepted her into their midst, the competition intensified because here was someone who would record their stories and provide continuity for their lives. Discussions often became argumentative:

This caldronlike quality is perhaps due to the elders' proximity to death and the realization that their remaining days are few. They want to be seen and heard from, before it is too late. Fiercely, they compete with each other for limited supplies of time and attention.⁴⁵

Again and again over the four years that Myerhoff worked with them, whenever she set a time for them to tell their stories, the people themselves limited how long they would

⁴³ Culbertson, 68.

⁴⁴ McAdams, 240.

⁴⁵ Myerhoff, 7.

listen before they interrupted to claim the floor for themselves. The listening was obligatory; the telling was imperative.

Near the end of the book, she wrote about her own grandmother who taught her the value of stories. As a child, Myerhoff was a poor eater, and she recalled sitting with her grandmother, who was trying to get her to eat. Each time she took a bite of food, she was rewarded by her grandmother's telling a story about the family who lived in one of the houses they could see from their window.

Sofie knew and taught me that everyone had some story, every house held a life that could be penetrated and known, if one took the trouble. Stories told to oneself or others could transform the world. Waiting for others to tell their stories, even helping them do so, meant no one could be regarded as completely dull, no place people lived in was without some hope of redemption, achieved by paying attention.⁴⁶

Stories are how we know ourselves; they organize our thoughts and inform us about our lives. They are how we identify ourselves to others, how we build relationships, how we know our world and the meaning of our lives. They help us to choose who we want to identify with—or not. And stories are especially important to the elderly. Reviewing their stories, telling and retelling them, hearing them and living them may be the most important spiritual work at the end of life. Our stories connect us to the past, to relationships in the present, both human and divine, and contain our hope for the future.

And every story matters, not only to ourselves but to all those who come after. The most ordinary person changes the world just by living his or her life. The Bible is full of such stories. The next chapter illustrates this: the stories of two women who had no idea that people would remember them and give thanks for their lives. They did only what they felt they had to do—like most of us.

⁴⁶ Myerhoff, 240.

CHAPTER 3
LESSER CHILDREN OF THE ONE GOD:
THE LEGACY OF TWO WOMEN IN THE BIBLE

*There was a context
in which I lived: unseen forces
acted upon me, or made their adjustments
in turn. There was a larger pattern
we worked at: they on a big
loom, I with a small needle,
drawing the thread
through my mind, colouring it
with my own thought.
Yet a power guided
My hand. If an invisible company
Waited to see what I would do,
I in my own way asked for
direction, so we should journey together
A little nearer the accomplishment
of the design.*

—R.S. Thomas, “In Context”

Ask the average reader of scripture to name ten important people in the Bible and chances are good that the list will include ten men. Eve might sneak in if Adam is named and Mary the mother of Jesus if the reader is Catholic, but for the most part, the stories of the Bible are the stories of men, some with women nearby. That means that The Story, the foundational story that feeds the faith of Jews and Christians, is composed of the stories of men.

Yet for the reader who will never lead a people across a parted sea, kill a giant with a rock and a slingshot, and heal the sick or raise the dead, it is the women whose stories, if read

carefully, may be most inspiring after all and most worth emulating. Their stories are less dramatic, or at least less dramatized, but their wills were attuned to the divine will in ways that drastically affected the plot of The Story.

The biblical record does not always tell the entire story, but the literature written in response to the Bible fills in some blanks while remaining tethered to the original source. This chapter will examine the stories of Rebekah, plus the *midrashim* and commentary that enhances her biblical story, along with the stories of Mary Magdalene in both canonical and non-canonical gospels. Had they not lived, or had they made different choices, our Story, the legacy we inherited, would have been very different.

REBEKAH

The Biblical Story

- *Rebekah's birth:* She is first mentioned in Genesis 22:23⁴⁷ right after Isaac is saved from sacrifice and presumably, has a future. She was born to Abraham's kin, making her an appropriate wife for Isaac. In the paragraph immediately following the announcement of Rebekah's birth, Sarah's death is recorded—her appropriate successor now having been presented.
- *The search for Rebekah:* Abraham sought a wife for his son, Isaac, from among his own people. He sent his most trusted servant, under oath, to his homeland, assuring the servant that the Lord would send an angel before him, and giving him a way to identify the woman. Abraham also told him that Isaac must *not* marry a woman from the Canaanites, among whom they lived, and twice told him that Isaac must *not* be

⁴⁷ All biblical citations in this chapter are from the New Revised Standard Version. All citations regarding Rebekah are from the book of Genesis.

- taken out of Canaan. Canaan was an alien land for Abraham and in order to change that, it had to be populated by his kin (24:2-9).
- *The meeting at the well:* The servant, laden with “many choice gifts,” traveled to Paddan-aram, Abraham’s home, and rested his camels at the end of the day near a well. As he prayed for success in his task, Rebekah appeared to draw water. When the servant asked for a drink, she not only quenched *his* thirst but offered to water his camels—no small task for ten camels who had just traveled far. This gracious offer was the identifier given to the servant by Abraham. Plus, “the woman was very fair to look at, a virgin, whom no man had known” (24:15-27) and she identified herself as Abraham’s grandniece, all of which gave further evidence of his success. The servant asked for and received an offer of hospitality with Rebekah’s family.
 - *Agreement to the marriage:* Laban, Rebekah’s brother, met them on the road to the family home and, thoroughly impressed with the gifts brought by the servant, invited him to rest and dine. The servant insisted that he first report his errand and the evidence, so far, of its fulfillment. The family quickly assented to the marriage, happily accepted the gifts, and provided hospitality to the servant. Rebekah, however, had free will and the right of refusal, but when asked if she would marry Isaac, she readily said, “I will.” Rebekah, along with her nurse, servants and belongings, departed immediately, despite the family’s plea that they delay a few days (24:28-61).
 - *The meeting and marriage of Rebekah and Isaac:* As they neared the end of their journey, Rebekah spied Isaac walking in his field and the servant referred to him as “my master,” indicating that Isaac had moved up to take Abraham’s place as the next patriarch. A veiled Rebekah approached Isaac, the servant reported his experience,

and Isaac brought Rebekah to his deceased mother's tent. They were married and the Bible reports that "Isaac was comforted after his mother's death" (24:62-67).

- *Rebekah's pregnancy and childbirth:* Isaac was forty when he married Rebekah and sixty when their twin sons were born, indicating that Rebekah was barren for twenty years—a biblical signal predicting a significant birth—until Isaac prayed for her to conceive. She did so, but "the children struggled together within her" driving her to seek answers from God as to her role in this obviously unusual birth: "If it is to be this way, why do I live?" (22:7). She thus became the first woman in the Bible to speak directly to God and receive an answer. She is told that her children shall father separate nations, one stronger than the other, and that the elder child would eventually serve the younger. When they were born, the first was ruddy and hairy. His name, Esau, is a word play on Edom, the nation to descend from him, and Edom is a word play on *adam*, red. The second child was born holding on to his brother's heel, named Ya'acov, or Jacob—"heel" in Hebrew, sometimes called "grabber" in the *midrashim* (25:20-26).
- *Rebekah's sons:* Esau grew to be "a skillful hunter, a man of the field," beloved by his father because Isaac "was fond of game." Jacob grew to be a quiet man, a homebody, living in tents, beloved by Rebekah. Once, when Jacob was cooking a lentil stew, Esau came in famished from hunting and demanded food. Jacob in turn demanded that Esau sell his birthright as the eldest son to Jacob, which the hungry Esau did, and thus "despised his birthright" (25:27-34).
- *Deceit, prosperity and grief for Rebekah and Isaac:* Despite famine in the land, Isaac settled as an alien in the land of Canaan. At one point, he presented Rebekah as his

sister rather than his wife, as Abraham had done (twice!) with Sarah, in fear that, because of her beauty, he would be killed so that she could be claimed. He was reprimanded by King Abimelech and sent away. Isaac eventually settled in the valley of Gerar where God appeared to him, bestowing upon him, through no merit of his own, all the blessings promised to Abraham. Isaac prospered so greatly that Abimelech returned to make a treaty with him, fearing Isaac's increased power. After this, when Esau was forty, he married two Hittite women "and they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah." Esau's marriage to foreign women further prohibited his fulfilling the covenant (26:1-34).

- *Rebekah's deceit of Isaac:* When Isaac was old and could not see, he summoned Esau to hunt game and prepare his favorite dish so that he might eat and bless his firstborn. Overhearing this, Rebekah sent Jacob to bring a sheep from the flock, which she prepared as Isaac had requested from Esau. She then dressed Jacob in Esau's clothing and the fleece of a goat so that he would feel and smell like his brother. Isaac was indeed deceived and bestowed the irrevocable covenant blessing upon Jacob. In Esau's fury at the loss of the blessing, he determined to kill his brother. Rebekah then sent Jacob away to save his life and Isaac directed him to his family at Paddan-aram to find a wife, just as Abraham had done for him (27:1–28:5). The covenant now secure, Rebekah disappeared from the story, not to be mentioned again until much later when Jacob himself was buried with her and other family members in a cave in the land of Canaan (49:29-33).

The biblical record describes Rebekah as beautiful, gracious, and willing to enter into God's plan. She was strong enough in her faith that during her troubling pregnancy, she

turned to God for answers and received them—something no woman in the Bible had done before her. Unlike Abraham’s wife, Sarah, she was monogamous and faithful to her husband.⁴⁸ Although often described as manipulative for tricking Isaac to bless Jacob, she also knew from before his birth that the blessing was his to receive. (There is no indication that she was aware of Esau’s selling of his birthright.)

It can also be argued that Rebekah was the brains and energy in the marriage and the true link between the older and younger patriarchs. Isaac was passive: he never left the land of Canaan, he did not choose his wife, he did nothing to merit God’s blessing other than being Abraham’s son, and his only personal preference the Bible saw fit to note was his appetite for food. “Isaac loved Esau *because* he was fond of game (25:28), and again, he demanded to be fed before pronouncing the final blessing that would secure his lineage (27:3-4). We do know that he prospered, presumably by his own efforts, and became powerful enough that Abimelech came to him to negotiate a treaty. Still, the Hebrew verb tenses are revealing: Isaac is mostly associated with passive verbs; in contrast, Rebekah is continually described by action verbs: to draw, to run, to tell, to do, the very important “I will” in 24:58, to take, to become, to pray, to listen, to prepare, to give, to send.

Rebekah also demonstrated her strength by her willingness to sacrifice her life and her relationships. When Jacob protested to his mother that his father might recognize him

⁴⁸ Abraham twice tried to pass off his wife, Sarai/Sarah as his sister because he feared that he would be harmed if powerful men wanted his wife. In 12:10-20, Pharaoh took her into his house, but when he found out she was actually Abraham’s wife, he raged at Abraham, “What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ so that I took her for my wife?”

In the second instance, Abimelech also took Abraham’s “sister,” but God came to him in a dream to reveal that she was a married woman. “Now Abimelech had not approached her,” so this time she returned to Abraham untouched (20:1-7).

In 26:6-11, Isaac tried to do the same thing for the same reason, to protect himself by passing his beautiful wife off as his sister, but the same Abimelech, who was perhaps now wise to the capacity for deceit of the men of this family, saw Isaac fondling Rebekah and reprimanded him, saying, “One of the people might easily have lain with your wife and you would have brought guilt upon us.” Rebekah thus avoided what befell Sarah.

despite his being disguised as Esau, and might curse him rather than bless him, Rebekah assured him that if there was to be a curse, “Let your curse be upon me, my son” (27:13). She thereby risked her life and certainly her relationship with her husband to procure for Jacob what God had promised. Later, she saved both her sons when she directed Jacob to flee to her brother Laban’s home to escape Esau’s wrath. “Why should I lose both of you in one day?” (27:45b). Had Esau killed Jacob, she would have lost her elder son by execution or blood vengeance.⁴⁹ Better to endure fury and separation.

Post-Biblical Commentary

Rabbinic writings,⁵⁰ including *midrashim*, the biblically-based legends and stories sometimes called ‘the gift wrapping around the Torah,’ hold Rebekah in high esteem, pointing out that even though she came from a godless, greedy family, she herself was beyond reproach. In fact, the rabbis grant her the status of Prophet, along with her husband, Isaac.⁵¹ Rashi,⁵² one of Judaism’s most important writers of rabbinic commentary, wrote in the eleventh century in France that Rebekah’s father, Bethuel, only appeared when the servant first arrived at his home, then disappeared. The next day, when the servant was ready to leave with Rebekah, there was no sign of him and the family urged the servant to delay “10 days” (24:55). Rashi posits that “He wanted to prevent (Rivkah’s leaving) (therefore) an

⁴⁹ Wayne A. Meeks, general ed., *The HarperCollins Study Bible, New Revised Standard Version* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 42n.

⁵⁰ Louis Ginsberg, *Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1909), vii. Rabbinic literature, including *midrashim*, began in the first century when Israel ceased to be a political entity with a central Temple and became a religion gathered in schools and synagogues. Rabbinic writings were always based in Torah, the Hebrew Bible, but the rabbinic commentary might include not just interpretations, but legends and folklore, homiletic material, and creative filler to slide between the lines of scripture.

⁵¹ *B’reishit Rabbah* 63:7, 67:9, quoted by Carol Bakhos in *The Torah: A Women’s Commentary*, 151.

⁵² Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki was known as Rashi.

angel came and killed him.”⁵³ And where the NRSV says “Her mother and her brother said, ‘Let the girl remain with us a while, at least ten days, then she may go,’” Rashi translates that verse as “Her brother and mother said, ‘Let the girl abide with us a year or ten months, then she can go.’” That was so that Rebekah’s father would have the right of redemption within a year, after the girl had had time “to obtain for herself jewelry and ornaments.”⁵⁴ Rashi takes pains to show that Rebekah’s agreement is the pivotal point in this chapter and the only choice that mattered. Once that “yes” had been spoken, God took care of the rest, including parental resistance.

The rabbis took pains to emphasize the continuity of the Jewish people, that even without land—as Abraham had been—God meant for their lineage to continue. Thus, not only did the patriarchs father sons, but Rebekah succeeded Sarah in God’s plan. Where the Bible reports simply that Isaac “brought her into his mother Sarah’s tent” (24:67), the *midrash* paints a much richer story, describing Sarah’s legacy to her prospective daughter-in-law:

After Isaac had heard the wonderful adventures of Eliezer, he took Rebekah to the tent of his mother Sarah, and she showed herself worthy to be her successor. The cloud appeared again that had been visible over the tent during the life of Sarah, and had vanished at her death; the light shone again in the tent of Rebekah that Sarah had kindled at the coming in of the Sabbath, and that had burnt miraculously throughout the week; the blessing returned with Rebekah that had hovered over the dough kneaded by Sarah; and the gates of the tent were opened for the needy, wide and spacious, as they had been during the lifetime of Sarah.⁵⁵

⁵³ Avrohom Davis, *The Metsudah Chumash/Rashi, Bereshis: A New Linear Translation* (Lakewood, NJ: Israel Bookshop Publications, 2002), 262.

⁵⁴ Rashi, 262.

⁵⁵ Louis Ginsberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1909), 297.

Modern Commentary

One modern commentator, Diane M. Sharon, questions whether Rebekah's actions actually fulfilled God's plan, or interfered with it. Rebekah assumed, as do most readers, that God favored Jacob to found the nation that would be God's people, but noting the ambiguity of the prophecy, Sharon asks, "What if its ambiguity is part of the divine purpose?" Rebekah took it upon herself to clarify that ambiguity in a way that favored her favorite son. If, in fact, Rebekah was following her own will and not God's, Sharon points out that we can rightfully expect the text to show "dire consequences," which indeed, it does. Jacob's life under the blessing was not easy: separation from his beloved mother, alienation from his brother, victimization by Laban, and a wait of seven years plus one week to marry his beloved Rachel, whom he then lost in childbirth, and of course, there was that angel-inflicted wound. As for Rebekah, she never again saw her beloved Jacob. "She pays a very high price for her determination to ignore the ambiguity of God's word."⁵⁶

But another contemporary writer disagrees. Based on both scripture and rabbinic writings, Carol Bakhos believes "It is Rebekah, rather than Isaac, who executes the divine will" and thus the rabbis accorded her the title of Prophet, along with Isaac.⁵⁷ The commentaries, ancient and modern, remember her as a beautiful, gracious, feisty woman who listened to God and did what she believed was needed, regardless of the cost to herself.

Carol Myers makes a useful distinction between *authority* and *power* that directly relates to Rebekah. *Authority* is the ability to control situations and decision making through official systems and channels, whereas *power* is the ability to do so through more informal

⁵⁶ Diane M. Sharon, "Another View," in *The Torah: A Woman's Commentary*, Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, ed. Rabbi Andrea L. Weiss, assoc. ed. New York: URJ Press and Women of Reform Judaism, 2008, 150.

⁵⁷ Carol Bakhos, "Post-Biblical Interpretations," in *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, 151.

and unofficial avenues.⁵⁸ Authority has its paragraph in the history books; it is easier to identify. But *power* changes the world. Rebekah did not have Isaac's authority, but she wielded great power as an instrument of God's will—a legacy lesser known, but ultimately of far greater consequence.

MARY MAGDALENE

The Biblical Record

Unlike Rebekah, Mary's appearances in the New Testament are brief and not terribly revealing.

Luke is the only gospel to mention Mary before the crucifixion in the passage that gives us the most information about her. During Jesus's ministry in Galilee:

The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Suzanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources (Luke 8:1-3).

The "seven demons" have done the most damage to Mary's reputation since the sixth century, when Pope Gregory I interpreted the demons to mean prostitution and thereafter doomed Mary to be dressed in sinful scarlet for centuries of artists' depiction of her. Only in the late twentieth century was Gregory's homiletic *midrash* challenged. In fact, there is no way to know what "demons" plagued Mary; only that Jesus healed her of her affliction.

The provision out of their resources is also unclear. Since Joanna is included here with Mary, an assumption by proximity can be made that the women were wealthy, as Joanna, married to the king's steward, surely was. Since the male disciples had left their homes and livelihood to follow Jesus (Luke 18:28), the implication is that the twelve, the

⁵⁸ Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 41.

“true witnesses,” were supported by the women, as well as by those who fed and sheltered them as they traveled the countryside.

However, the Greek verb translated as “provided” in Luke 8:3 is *diakoneo*, the same verb used to describe the work of a deacon: to serve, to wait on, to minister to.⁵⁹ Did the women serve the men? Financially support the men? Both? We do not know.

Mary Magdalene’s name is usually the first name cited when women are listed in Jesus’s company, indicating her superior importance among the women around him. (The exception is in John’s description of the Crucifixion, when Jesus’s mother and aunt are listed first.)

Although she is mentioned with slightly more detail in Luke’s gospel than the others, it is important to note that while Luke presents more material about women than the other evangelists do, in almost every case the women are subordinate to men. (The meeting between Mary and Elizabeth in chapter 1 is a notable exception.) Jane Schaberg calls it “a dangerous text, perhaps the most dangerous in the Bible.”⁶⁰ Also, in Luke’s genealogy of Jesus (3:23-38), unlike Matthew’s, not a single woman is mentioned. Schaberg sees Luke’s gospel as “an attempt to legitimate male dominance in the Christianity of the author’s time” and adds, “It was successful.”⁶¹

Luke’s only other mention of Mary Magdalene by name is after the Resurrection, when the “women who had come with him from Galilee” went to the tomb with spices to anoint his body. They found the tomb empty, were terrorized by “two men in dazzling

⁵⁹ Jane Schaberg “Luke” in *The Women’s Biblical Commentary*. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 287.

⁶⁰Ibid., 275.

⁶¹ Ibid.

clothes,” and ran to tell “the eleven and the rest.” Again, Mary is named first among the women, but again also, hers was not the definitive word for Luke. The men believed the news brought by the women to be “an idle tale” and ran to see for themselves (24:10-11).

Matthew and Mark tell the same story of the women at both the Crucifixion and after the Resurrection, but both identify Mary Magdalene among the women looking on from a distance. Matthew notes that these same women had followed Jesus “from Galilee” (27:55-56), while Mark writes that they accompanied Jesus “when he was in Galilee” (15:41).

John’s gospel alone places Mary by herself in the garden after the Resurrection. She is first mentioned standing near the cross at the Crucifixion with Jesus’s female relatives, but after the Resurrection, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb alone, found it empty, and ran to report to the others, thus giving her, by the second century, the title of “apostle to the apostles.”

While these are the only mentions in the New Testament of Mary Magdalene by name, her identity has been conflated with other women who remain nameless, especially with the woman who appears at a dinner with an alabaster jar of ointment and anoints Jesus.⁶² In Luke 7:37, she is called “a sinner,” but in John 12:3, the same story is told with Mary, sister of Martha, doing the anointing. Gregory I conflated the names and stories and came to the conclusion that Mary Magdalene, the prostitute, had anointed Jesus. Having made this homiletic leap, he then preached the sermon heard round the world (eventually). Mary Magdalene was the redeemed sinner, a model for average Christians, sinners all, who are offered redemption through Christ. Poor Mary. An early victim of identity theft!

⁶² In Mark 14:3 and Matthew 6:6-13, the ointment, identified as “very costly” by Matthew, is poured on Jesus’ head. In Luke 7:37-50, the woman first bathes his feet with her tears, wiping them with her hair, then anoints them with ointment. In John 12:1-8, however, the woman anointing Jesus is identified as “Mary,” presumably the sister of Martha and Lazarus, since the dinner was in Bethany.

Bruce Chilton puts Mary's transformation into historical perspective:

By the time the Gospels were written, more than forty years after Jesus' death, Christianity had declared the allegedly "natural" authority of men over women, to this extent conforming to its surrounding society. An increasingly male clergy tightly controlled exorcism and anointing; a literally physical view of Resurrection began to prevail. It is not surprising that after her death Mary Magdalene was nearly written out of the record of Christian memory.⁶³

Mary Magdalene was too important to write out completely, however, which the mention of her at key moments demonstrates, but the writers say as little as possible about her in the gospels. By the time the pseudo-Pauline writings—Ephesians, Colossians and the letters of Timothy and Titus—were added to the canon of the New Testament, the male dominance of the early Church had been set in stone. Those writings, in particular, encourage male dominance in the early Church.

Still, limited though they are, the gospels convey vital information about Mary Magdalene: She was a woman who sought healing; she was a woman of some wealth; she was a disciple, a learner; she was an apostle, a messenger; she was not married; and she had the courage of her convictions as evidenced by her willingness to travel the country with men who were not family, and her willingness to stay near the cross despite the danger of being identified with Jesus.

The writers of the gospels have stripped her of authority and indicted her reputation, but they could not, nor could the Church, take away her power within Christianity. Chilton states it well: "Mary became the living, breathing embodiment of the ascendance and power of Spirit. And for all the twists and turns of Christian legend, she has always stood for

⁶³ Bruce Chilton, *Mary Magdalene: A Biography*. (New York: Doubleday, 2005), xi.

personal victory over evil.”⁶⁴ That power, however, is better illustrated in the extra-biblical literature of the time.

The Non-Canonical Gospels

More commonly called the Gnostic Gospels,⁶⁵ the scrolls containing most of these writings were discovered sealed in an urn in Egypt, near Nag Hammadi, in 1945. Scholars determined that some of them dated to the earliest days of the Church, the Gospel of Thomas possibly being contemporary with the Gospel of Mark. They were probably placed in the urn around the fourth century, the same time as Athanasius announced the official canon of the New Testament.⁶⁶ These sacred writings clearly had not made the cut among orthodox Christians—those who, by the fourth century, held both authority *and* power. Elaine Pagels pointed out that while the orthodox Christians deemed the Gnostics “heretics,” their canonical victory was as much about politics as it was about theology. At the end of the first century, Clement, then bishop of Rome, issued a letter proclaiming that “the God of Israel alone rules all things” and delegates this authority to “rulers and leaders on earth.” Who were these leaders? According to Clement, it was the “bishops, priests, and deacons,”⁶⁷ who, by then, were all male. No wonder the women were minor characters in the gospels!

The theology presented in these non-canonical gospels differs dramatically from the canon. The Gnostics believed the Resurrection was symbolic rather than actual, that Jesus

⁶⁴ Chilton, 28.

⁶⁵ Karen King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2003), 156–57. While Elaine Pagels, in her Pulitzer Prize winning book, *The Gnostic Gospels*, differentiated among Jewish-Christians, twenty-five years later King would make the statement “there was no such thing as Gnosticism. She described them as “academic constructs,” not separate groups who self-identified as such.

⁶⁶ Cynthia Bougeault, *The Meaning of Mary Magdalene: Discovering the Woman at the Heart of Christianity* (Boston: Shambhala, 2010), 33.

⁶⁷ Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 40.

preached internal transformation rather than external obedience to rules and the authority of strong leaders, that men and women were equal in their faith and status, and that Mary Magdalene understood more than any others among Jesus's closest followers. Not surprisingly, her intimacy with Jesus created problems among the men who lived in a culture where this was unthinkable.

In the gospels of Phillip, Thomas, and Mary,⁶⁸ Jesus and Mary clearly have a closer relationship than Jesus has with any of the men, and Mary is presented as the one who best understands his teachings. In the Gospel of Mary, Andrew responds to Mary's teaching:

Say what you will about all that she has said to us, I for one do not believe that the Savior said such things to her, for they are strange and appear to differ from the rest of his teachings.

Peter agrees:

Would the Savior speak these things to a woman in private without openly sharing them so that we too might hear? Should we listen to her at all, and did he choose her over us because she is more worthy than we are?

Mary begins to weep, responding to Peter:

My brother what are you thinking? Do you imagine that I have made these things up myself within my heart, or that I am lying about the Savior?

Levi steps in, addressing Peter:

You have always been quick to anger, Peter, and now you are questioning her in exactly that same manner, treating this woman as if she were an enemy. If the Savior considered her worthy, who are you to reject her? He knew her completely and loved her faithfully.

We should be ashamed of ourselves! As he taught us, we should be clothed instead with the cloak of True Humanity, and following his command announce Good News without burdening it further with rules or laws he himself did not give us.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ The Gospel of Mary Magdalene was discovered in 1897 in a Cairo marketplace, not as part of the Nag Hammadi writings.

⁶⁹ Bourgeault, 75-76.

What a contrast to the woman barely mentioned in the canonical gospels! How different the Church would be if the Mary of these gospels had been held up for all to see in those early days. What, then, *is* her legacy?

Modern Culture

Given the minimal amount of information in the New Testament, and the lack of access to the non-canonical writings until recently, Church tradition was free to sexualize Mary, not only as a prostitute, but in modern culture as the wife of Jesus and with him, the founder of a dynasty.

In the Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber 1973 play, *Jesus Christ, Superstar*, the writers followed the gospels, canonical and non-canonical, as well as Church tradition to form Mary. In this play, she comforts Jesus, Peter objects, and Jesus tells him to leave her alone. She also sings about him: “I don’t know how to love him.... He’s a man, he’s just a man, and I’ve had so many men before. In very many ways, he’s just one more.”

In Martin Scorsese’s 1989 film, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Jesus has a vision from the cross in which he marries Mary and leads a normal life. When she dies, he marries Mary of Bethany and has children. This film caused an uproar in the Christian establishment. It was heresy; it was an affront to Christian sensibilities to even imagine that Jesus had been a sexual being, much less married! It was acceptable to portray Mary as a prostitute in art and in “Superstar,” but Jesus couldn’t even be a married man!

Dan Brown’s *The DaVinci Code* went a step further, making an even greater impact by not only marrying Jesus and Mary, but giving them children and extending their line into the present. A lot of print and air time was spent, especially by the Catholic Church, denying that such a story was even a possibility.

In all three extremely popular stories, all written by men, Mary is sexualized. The good news is that fiction has pushed Mary into the limelight, and the recent excellent research about her role in the early Church is correcting her story. She is still an inspiration, but now not only as a redeemed sinner and apostle to the apostles, but as scholar, lover, leader, and bearer of what may be more authentic good news than what we know from the Bible.

Rebekah never expected to have authority, except in her own household, but she earned and was granted great power. Mary was stripped of the authority Jesus gave her, at least in the gospels, but her power as a faithful woman has sustained despite the sexy clothes and bad press.

Were it not for the Bible, the important roles played by Rebekah and Mary would be unknown. But it is equally true that the Bible cannot be trusted to stand alone. An educated reader knows scripture is not historically accurate, but does not always recognize its propensity to deliberately distort history. We must always examine the agenda of the writers, the response of the community around the writings, and the actual legacy of the people whose stories are told therein.

In her anthropological study of a community of elderly Jews in California, Barbara Myerhoff quotes an old man named Abe as he talks about his mother's legacy to him: the passion to work for peace. Abe says,

I'm not so big, like Abraham, Moses, Christ, and Buddha. But you should know, they too didn't want war. Those people left their footsteps on history, and in my smaller way, I may do that also. I'm not boasting. I just want to bring out a few things.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Myerhoff, 117.

Like Abe, like Rebekah and Mary, legacy is about each of us leaving our footprints on history, changing it. Like George Bailey in the film *It's A Wonderful Life*, who could not see what good he had done until the angel Clarence Odbody showed him a world in which he had never lived, and how tragically different it was from the world in which he had lived, worked and played, and most of all, cared about the welfare of other people. George saved a community bank, Abe worked for peace, Rebekah bore sons who changed their world, and Mary helped to preserve what may be the more genuine themes of a great teacher—but even the person who has lived a plainer life, leaving no progeny or printed words, still leaves a legacy and the legacy deserves a witness. Myerhoff again:

The one who believes in God tells Him the story. The one who does not must tell it to progeny, to humankind, and to oneself. *Homo narrans*, humankind as storyteller, is a human constant.⁷¹

In the next section, we move from research, scripture and theory to the lives and stories of real people. Part II of this thesis examines the Demonstration Project, analyzes the outcomes and retreads for the future.

⁷¹ Myerhoff, 272.

CHAPTER 4 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT

*Someday if there's a someday we will
bring food, you'll say I can't eat what you've brought
I'll say Have some in the name of our
trying to be friends, you'll say What about you?
We'll taste strange meat and we'll admit
we've tasted stranger.*

—Adrienne Rich, “Negotiations”

This chapter describes how a doctoral student and two groups of strangers came together to “taste strange meat” in an atmosphere of trust and mutual learning. The process of this project follows the “Plan of Implementation” set forth in my proposal (Appendix A), augmented with details on the methods used to structure and implement the project, and in general, order our lives together.

The research done in this project was qualitative, perhaps better described as *heuristic*, a method that looks to human experience to designate the questions to be asked. Put another way, this type of research helps to unearth what *needs* to be studied for better understanding. It opens the subject to reveal what questions need to be asked.⁷²

⁷² Clark Moustakas, “Heuristic Research: Design and Methodology,” in *The Handbook of Humanistic Psychology: Edges in Theory, Research and Practice*. Kirk J. Schneider, James F.T. Bugental and J. Fraser Pierson, eds. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001), 264–67.

“The focus in a heuristic quest is on recreation of the lived experience, that is, full and complete depictions of the experience from the frame of reference of the experiencing person. The challenge is fulfilled through examples, narrative descriptions, dialogues, stories, poems, artwork, journals and diaries, autobiographical logs, and other personal documents. The heuristic process is congruent with Schopenhauer’s (1966) reference to lyric poetry: The depicted is “also at the same time the depicter.” ...A typical way of gathering material is through an ‘interview’ which often takes the form of dialogues with oneself and co-researchers. ...To design a heuristic research study that will reveal the meanings and essences of a particular human experience in an accurate, comprehensive, and vivid way, it is essential that the question be stated in simple, clear, and concrete

GOAL #1: METHODS USED TO RAISE AWARENESS

I chose the two venues because of their contrast one to another, and because in both, I would have well-educated elders who could join me as co-researchers in this project and appreciate the necessary level of commitment for a doctoral project. Kendal on Hudson is adjacent to the hospital where I work so it was convenient and my proposal was welcomed enthusiastically. I anticipated that my group would likely be all white and Christian, Jewish and possibly agnostic, and I was correct.

A member of my site team had been on the board of the Morningside Heights Housing Corporation and suggested that venue as well, promising more diversity. (The audience of ten at my initial presentation included Chinese, African American and Caucasian men and women.) Additional contrasts between the two settings included urban vs. suburban settings, and while the residents of Kendal had left the home of their middle years to join a newly-formed community, the people at MG were aging in place after living decades in the same location. The contrasts between the two groups were intriguing enough to warrant double duty for the project.

After choosing the two venues and proposing my project to the proper authorities, the next step was to present to an audience of elders in both Kendal and Morningside Gardens the ideas that led to the project and how they could participate. I would interview all those interested in participating to be sure they understood the project and commitment asked of them, but the presentation was the first broad sweep to entice participants.

terms....In heuristic interviewing, the data generated are dependent on accurate empathic listening; being open to oneself and co-researchers; being flexible and free to vary procedures to respond to what is required in the flow of dialogue; and being skillful in creating a climate that encourages co-researchers to respond comfortably, accurately, comprehensively, and honestly in elucidating the phenomenon.”

I met first with the recreation director at Kendal, who referred me to the Chairs of the Education Committee and the Faith Group (a more didactic group), an immediate illustration of the democratic process at Kendal. They scheduled me to present at the weekly Monday evening lecture on January 16, 2012. About 60 people attended the presentation (see Appendix B); 30 people returned the brief survey I distributed (see Appendix C). Nine people ultimately joined the group.

On February 8, 2012 I gave the same presentation to a much smaller group at Morningside Gardens, having worked out the details with Ron Bruno, the Executive Director of Morningside Retirement and Health Services. This session was advertised in advance in the monthly newsletter, as well as by posting flyers in the MG buildings. Ten people attended the presentation; nine gave me completed surveys (one person was called away before we finished), and four of those people would become the project group.

GOAL #2: PROJECT GROUP FORMATION

This turned out to be the most complicated part of the project. Although none of the participants had a regular job, scheduling them to meet for the six weeks of the workshop was surprisingly difficult. In the MG group, although nine of the ten (including the woman who left early) were interested, only four could commit to the six weeks. Scheduling them required several phone calls (two of the women did not have e-mail access). We had only one option for a meeting space—a small conference room in the MRHS suite used mostly for storage—and we agreed to meet there on Tuesday evenings.

Scheduling the Kendal group was another matter altogether: it required numerous phone calls and considerable flexibility with my own schedule. Residents of Kendal are expected to be involved in the Kendal community and can choose from numerous

opportunities to do so. In fact, other than the magnificent view of the Hudson, the number and quality of activities have much to do with why people move to Kendal. Finding a time when I could meet with the largest number of people interested in the group was challenging and eventually required excluding five people who might have participated. We finally settled on Wednesday afternoons and agreed to meet in the one room open: an exercise room with a mirrored wall where we would sit in a circle of chairs.

I spoke to each of the people interested in the group to be sure they understood first, that I needed a firm commitment from them, and secondly, the structure, content, and process of what I proposed.

The initial meeting places for both groups turned out to be annoyingly unsatisfactory. At MG, the conference room was small and stuffy, crowded with office machinery and papers, and not at all conducive to the intimacy that this group would develop. Nimrod, the only man in the group, immediately offered his studio apartment where he set up a card table and served cheeses, cookies, and soft drinks. He invited others in the group to offer their apartments, which two other group members did immediately. The remaining five sessions were conducted with light refreshments and hospitality as we rotated among three apartments. Without doubt, this generosity contributed to the participants' willingness to disclose and discuss, and when the project ended, to continue friendships. While a neutral setting is usually preferable for research, in this case, hospitality and the physical closeness of a card table helped people to reflect honestly on their lives and respectfully receive the revelations from others in the group. The discovery of the importance of setting became a critical part of the process of heuristic inquiry. We didn't realize how important it was in the beginning, but our experience made that clear.

As we would discover, spirituality is, to a great degree, about connectedness. The home settings at MG encouraged the building of trust and relationships—a gracious environment for the work we did.

The Kendal group also disliked the first meeting room, mainly because of acoustics, but also the discomfort of not sitting at tables and of being in a windowless room with mirrors. We received permission to use a section of one of the dining rooms where we could pull tables together next to a window that overlooked the river. The afternoon sun required that we pull shades over the window, but the lightness and quiet of the setting, plus the table that drew us together, was much more conducive to our work together. Only when I interviewed participants individually after the workshop sessions did I learn that they, too, would have much preferred meeting in their various apartments.

In determining their meeting place, the participants of both groups asserted their opinion of how we would work together, which signaled to them that they would have choices all through the process. In both cases as well, the better setting drew us together more effectively to work, to laugh, to learn, and to trust each other.

At the first session, I had each participant complete an Informed Consent Form in which I stated there would be no audio or videotaping. We agreed the sessions would be two hours long, to begin and end promptly, which we did. I also articulated some basic ground rules for group process: one person would speak at a time and we would listen and respond appropriately, and what was said in the group remained in the group. I did encourage them to talk to one another as they worked through their homework, and in one case, that worked out particularly well. A woman with severe macular degeneration could not read the written

material I distributed to them, so a man in the group offered to read it to her, which expanded, for them, into useful discussion.

I reinforced the subject of confidentiality at the second Kendal session at the request of one member of the group, who spoke to me privately and pointed out that in a closed community such as theirs, gossip was rampant.

The one rule I spoke about at length and insisted upon was that this would be a forum where each participant brought his or her own set of beliefs and could freely discuss them. No beliefs would be judged; all would be respected. This was not an issue in the MG group. New Yorkers live with diversity, expect it and respect it.

At Kendal, however, discussing one's beliefs had become taboo. One simply didn't do it. Our group, however, would be a place where those ideas were relevant to the work we were doing together. I encouraged them to express their beliefs, as much or as little as they felt was comfortable and relevant.

WORKSHOP STRUCTURE AND PROCESS

Both workshops followed the same program, although the MG workshop was two weeks behind the Kendal workshop.

At the first session, I used an icebreaker that asked each person to name the bird she or he would want to be if, after death, they could come back as a bird. They were also asked to explain their choice. I then asked the group what their choices said about their spirituality. Not surprisingly, no one at this early stage could make the connection, but I asked them to keep their bird in mind as we progressed.

We then discussed the steps of the workshop as I had arranged them. I chose the topics for the sessions based on my experience in pastoral care with elderly patients in the

hospital. Often forgiveness issues blocked healing, making that a critically important subject to discuss. And for people who might be mourning the loss of their “productive” years, the examination of personal legacy was important to help them bring their gifts into the present.

I explained to the group that I believed it was important for them to know their past before they could fully understand their present and project into their future, so the next three sessions would be spent reflecting on their life to that point. I had not intended to include end-of-life discussions because that is so widely presented in other settings. They, however, pointed out that death was too near and too important to put aside. We agreed that we would do a session on dying and death, but I suggested it be the penultimate session because I did not want to end with death. Again, as part of the heuristic approach, the group was able to change the syllabus to include what mattered to them.

The first assignment was for the group members to write their spiritual autobiography, their personal journey of religious involvement if any, relationship with God, important personal connections—whatever had fed their spirits during their lifetime, told in whatever form they desired. I quoted Hugh Hefner to them: “You can’t know where you are if you don’t know where you’ve been.” I asked for two or three pages and a copy of whatever they produced, and I gave them material that might help them. For the dual reason of being the first to disclose and trust, and to give them a possible model, I then read my own three-page spiritual autobiography.⁷³ I requested that I be allowed to do so uninterrupted, that informational questions be held until I finished, and that responses be directly relevant to

⁷³ While there is question about whether or not, or how much, a group leader self-discloses, both the heuristic model and the Clinical Pastoral Education model in which I was trained recommend some personal disclosure. In CPE, it is typical for the supervisor to present his or her own spiritual autobiography before asking students to do the same. The effective group facilitator knows how to insert him- or herself to the point it is useful to the group without it becoming an ego trip for the leader. The question of leadership involvement should, however, always be carefully considered.

what I had presented. Before others presented their spiritual autobiographies at the next session, I again articulated this model of listening and responding.

In session 2, participants presented their own spiritual autobiographies. Not everyone in the Kendal group did the writing and while only the people who wrote had the privilege of speaking, it was also true that they were more exposed while the non-writers had maintained their privacy. We could have together increased our understanding about our process if I had thought to question both the writers and the non-writers on how they felt about not everyone doing the homework and thus not speaking, but it did not occur to me at the time.

The homework for session 3 involved reflecting on and writing about the issue of forgiveness in their past and present lives. I wanted them to recognize the heavy baggage they've dragged forward when forgiveness issues go unresolved. I had asked them to list people and things they needed to forgive, and be prepared to discuss *not* the particulars of their issues but the *process* of naming them.

During session 3 of the Kendal group, another resident arrived to join the group without any prior contact with me or introduction when he arrived. I had not thought to state beforehand that this would be a closed group, and I, along with other group members, was taken by surprise. What they knew but I did not, was that this man, a brilliant but argumentative atheist, joined discussions regularly, turning them into debates. At that moment, it would have been awkward to dismiss him from the group when he took a seat at the other end of the table from me, but with his arrival, I sensed a tension in the group that had not existed before. Shortly into the group, he argued about what another participant professed as personal belief, and I interrupted immediately to reiterate what I had told the group at the first session: that there would be no judgment or argument about anyone's

beliefs. Before the next session, I spoke with the newcomer about the project and about disturbing the dynamics of an established group, which he readily understood and agreed not to return.

The homework for session 4 involved reflecting and writing about their legacies and what they would include in an ethical will. Like forgiveness issues, we talked about how these positive aspects of our past lives impacted on the present, but the ethical will was the vehicle for understanding how our legacies would continue after us. Because the ethical will comes out of Jewish tradition, its concept was familiar for those in the group who had Jewish roots, but confusing for those who did not.⁷⁴

Their homework for session 5 concerned planning for their own dying and death, writing their own obituaries and articulating their feelings about this last, inevitable experience. At our meeting, we talked about their wishes for the days just before their death, their funeral plans, and their hopes, if any, for life after death. It would become perhaps the liveliest discussion of the entire workshop.

The homework for session 6, the final session, was to think about how they would use what they've learned during the workshop to enrich their lives, and perhaps by extension, the lives of others, in the present and future. We reviewed their choice of birds from the first session to see if their choices now gave them deeper insight into their spiritual lives. In the center of the table at each of these last sessions was a grouping of small flowering plants, in various colors. Each person was invited to take a plant in the color of his or her choice to

⁷⁴ Jo Kline Cebular, *So Grows the Tree: Creating an Ethical Will* (West Des Moines, IA: Murphy Publishing, 2010), 10–11. An Ethical Will is a non-legal written document that expresses one's beliefs and values, life lessons, and hopes for the future. It comes out of Jewish tradition and is traced back to Genesis 49, Jacob advising and blessing his sons before his death.

symbolize whatever bloomed for them during our six weeks together, and as a small gift from me.

POST-WORKSHOP EVALUATION

I was able to interview each participant except for one woman who left abruptly at the last session of the MG group and refused to be interviewed.⁷⁵ I met with each person privately, for about an hour, usually in their apartments. While I asked them similar questions, I did not use a survey tool, preferring to use my pastoral skill of active listening, encouraging each person to discuss what seemed most important to them. Again, I felt this would allow for more heuristic discovery of issues I might have overlooked before.

Following the official completion of the project, the remaining three members (of four) of the MG group and I went to a celebratory lunch at the Columbia Faculty Club, and subsequently, we had lunch together during the summer. We remain in contact with each other. The Kendal group wanted to continue and we decided to meet monthly to continue our discussions, meeting now in participants' apartments. I continue as the group facilitator, but they set the agenda with topics they want to discuss in a group with a high level of trust. While during the project workshop, I kept my personal feelings and beliefs private, I now feel freer to insert them in discussion, but minimally. These meetings have deepened my research considerably, and that will be further discussed in Chapter 11.

One element of my proposal was not carried out was that of using films as a basis for discussion. I tried to use a segment of a film in the Kendal group, but the participants were much more interested in talking about their experiences and listening to each other than

⁷⁵ Despite follow-up attempts from myself and each group member, she would not disclose her reason for leaving nor agree to continue relationship with any of the other group members. The incident was reported to the Executive Director of MRHS and discussed with the psychologist and the psychotherapist on the Site Team.

watching even a short segment of film. In addition, we never seemed to have enough time; their schedules were as overstuffed as my own. Finally, logistically, it would have been difficult to find a place and time to watch films in addition to our discussion time.

What this clearly indicated was that we needed all the time we had for each person to probe the meaning of his or her life, as much or as little as they desired. All I did was solicit the stories. They were more than happy to tell them.

CHAPTER 5 PROJECT SETTINGS

*We are ensnared in the satraps of poisoned modernity.
We beat conundrums of confusion and confession.
And the river is a witness to our fervor; a mirror to our passion,
A quiet repository of grief, of joy, of mystery, and constancy.*
—Robert Milby, “The Hudson River in Winter”

As I planned this project, I chose two settings that would suffice and offer some contrast to each other. As the project progressed, however, I realized that the settings were more than just places to hold group meetings. Each setting strongly impacted how the men and women of each group engaged life in their older age, how they reflected on their life to that point, and how they looked ahead to older age and possible debility.

I chose Kendal on Hudson, a senior facility, because it is adjacent to where I work at Phelps Hospital and because I knew I’d have an intelligent, thoughtful group of elders who would work with me, using their own experience, to investigate and articulate the spiritual needs and gifts of the elderly. I chose Morningside Gardens because of its diversity, its urban location, the opportunity to work with a NORC (Naturally Occurring Retirement Community) and again, because I would likely have a sophisticated group of people with whom to work.

In both cases, the people self-selected after my invitation to form working groups. And in each case, from the beginning, they taught me about where they lived and why, and invited me to know and appreciate this, their place.

KENDAL ON HUDSON

Built in 2005, this continuing care senior living facility is situated between the eastern shore of the Hudson River and Phelps Memorial Hospital Center on the hill above it. Only the train tracks of the Hudson Line that runs from New York City to Albany separate it from the fjord that is the Hudson, and the many vantage points where one can view the river and its far shore enhance life at Kendal. Immediately adjacent to Kendal on the north, also on the river, is Rockwell Hall Park, part of the Rockefeller State Park Preserve and a former Rockefeller homestead. A 1.5 mile trail follows an old carriage road around the lush, well-kept property, providing the opportunity for a vigorous, if not strenuous, walk. Kendal residents mix with locals and their dogs through every season of the year in Rockwell Park.

Kendal on Hudson is part of the Kendal Corporation, which has its origins in the early 1960s when the Philadelphia Society of Friends formed a Commission on Aging to address the needs of a growing senior population. The commitments and values of the Kendal Corporation reflect those of the Society of Friends in that they welcome people of all races and creeds, work to build community, and enhance life for all ages. The Kendal Corporation Commitments include the following:

WE ARE INSPIRED BY the deeply held belief and confirming observations that the later stages of life can bring new opportunities for growth and development even if emerging challenges may bring some loss of independence.

WE WILL BE SUCCESSFUL WHEN all people in our society approach the later years with an understanding of the aging process, with an appreciation of the potential for continued growth and development, and with realistic plans to address the variety of circumstances that may arise during the later period of life.

WE ENVISION THE FULL IMPACT OF OUR WORK AS the transformation of our culture's view of aging, of older persons, and of the potential for fulfillment and continuing contribution during the later stages of life.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ "Values and Practices," Kendal Corporation, 2008, p. 2.

Kendal on Hudson is a 222-apartment facility, offering both independent and assisted living, plus a skilled nursing section. A strong component of the residence, as with all Kendal residences, is a varied program that includes an impressive list of educational and social opportunities. But as in so many such residences, while there are cultural, social and health programs, very little is offered about spirituality. When I spoke to the Health Services Administrator, she was excited about my doing my Demonstration Project at Kendal, feeling that it would be a unique opportunity for their residents. A further conversation with the heads of the Education Committee and Faith Committee (both PhDs sympathetic to my doctoral requirements) generated even more enthusiasm and discussion of logistical options.

The Kendal community, although existing among the middle class “rivertowns” of western Westchester County, is set apart by the high purchase price of an apartment. Thus the population is affluent, primarily Caucasian, and primarily with Christian or Jewish roots. But apart from their personal beliefs, the residents have chosen to live in a senior community organized around Quaker values.

Significant to this setting is that everyone there left behind the site(s) of their most productive years and the communities in which they lived, worked, and perhaps raised their children. They brought with them only the words of their personal histories and some mementos; witnesses were left behind. They came to form a new community. Even in their 60s, 70s and 80s, they were beginning again. Quaker values, the great river, and their passion to continue learning were three of the bonds that continue to draw them together.

THE RIVERTOWNS AROUND KENDAL

Using the Phelps Hospital catchment area as a guide, this section describes the towns nearest to Kendal, the towns in which residents shop, worship, vote and volunteer. The

catchment begins in the south on the Hudson at Dobbs Ferry and proceeds north along the river into Irvington, Tarrytown, Sleepy Hollow, Ossining and Croton-on-Hudson. It also includes the inland villages of Briarcliff Manor and Pleasantville. Table 2 below shows the populations of these towns and villages as of the 2010 census.

Town or Village	Population as of the 2010 Census
Briarcliff Manor	7,696
Croton-on-Hudson	7,606
Dobbs Ferry	10,622
Irvington	6,631
Ossining Village	24,010
Ossining (unincorporated)	5,514
Pleasantville	7,172
Sleepy Hollow	9,212
Tarrytown	11,090
Total Rivertowns Population in 2010	89,553 ⁷⁷

The total population is about the size of a small city, but without a central business district, political structure, administration, services, or identity. What each of these villages and the hospital share is the proximity to the river and its history, from Washington Irving to the Rockefellers, plus the cultural pull to New York City. No matter where one stands in any of these communities, one is aware of the location of the Hudson. There are pockets of wealth and pockets of poverty in these villages, but for the most part they span the full range

⁷⁷ “Westchester County Towns and Villages Population Information”
 Delphirealty.com/commun/towns.htm.

of the middle class. It is common to find local residents who have lived their entire lives in the area, as did their parents before them. The racial make-up is primarily Caucasian with large minorities of both African Americans and South/Central Americans. The Latino community is the fastest growing minority and includes a significant number of well-educated Latinos who left their professional careers behind to come to America.

The number of buildings dedicated to organized religion indicates that once, these communities were deeply (or at least, conventionally) religious. Many of those congregations now struggle to keep their doors open. Among the villages named there are eight Catholic, seven Episcopal, five Presbyterian, and numerous Baptist and Evangelical churches; five synagogues; plus Ethical Society, Unitarian Universalist, Mormon, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Unification ("Moonies") congregations. A large well-educated Muslim community is seeking to build a mosque in Ossining and a Buddhist Temple is within a half-hour's drive. Not all the villages can claim diversity, but the larger area certainly can do so.

PHELPS MEMORIAL HOSPITAL CENTER

Phelps Memorial Hospital Center, in addition to its physical proximity to Kendal (and in fact, owning the property on which Kendal is built), is also the medical center that serves the people in Kendal and the rivertowns. Located above the eastern shore of the Hudson River in Sleepy Hollow, New York, it was built in the 1950s by the Rockefeller and Phelps families to replace two small and antiquated hospitals in the community: Ossining Hospital to the north and Tarrytown Hospital to the south. The land had belonged to the Phelps family and an original mansion, still known as the James House, is in use for the hospital and looks down on Kendal. The John D. Rockefeller estate, Kykuit, is nearby in Sleepy Hollow.

Licensed for 240 beds, Phelps has a daily census that varies between 120 and 200, most of whom live in the hospital's catchment area. However, because of its exceptional orthopedic staff, and the fact that the Memorial Sloan Kettering Westchester Cancer Center is onsite, some patients do come from all over Westchester County and beyond.

Over the years, Phelps administration has been alert to societal preferences in medical care and acutely aware of financial advantages. An adjacent medical building was built to house a satellite of the world-famous Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center; a twelve-seat hyperbaric chamber was installed, the largest of the few in the area, for wound healing; a new state-of-the-art twelve-bed Critical Care Unit was opened in 2002, and a new thirty-bed Emergency Department opened in 2009. Although limited by its cramped double-occupancy patient rooms at a time when the model of excellent hospital design is private rooms, Phelps Hospital has worked hard and spent wisely to maintain a vital role in an increasingly competitive healthcare market.

Phelps is part of the Stellaris Health Network, an administrative umbrella of four Westchester County hospitals of similar size and mission that share information technology, purchasing, and best practices.

In addition to Memorial Sloan-Kettering and Stellaris, Phelps is affiliated with Mount Sinai Health's Senior Consultation Services and with Kendal on Hudson.

Employees come and go, but Phelps has a significant number of employees who have worked there for decades. Salaries are slightly lower than at other hospitals in Westchester, but employees enjoy job security and an intentionally congenial working environment.

As hospitals do these days, Phelps sought to find a specialty that would be unique in a competitive market. Planners looked at several age groups and populations. Because the

Westchester County Medical Center, seven miles away, has a new children's hospital, pediatrics was not a good choice. Eventually, Phelps settled on Senior Health. At that time, no one else in the area was focusing on the aging population. And because the hospital's catchment area is only 180 degrees around the hospital, thanks to the river, Phelps had to find a large population that would utilize its specialty. Services were developed which, though not limited to elders, serve mostly the elderly: the hyperbaric chamber for wound healing, a pain center, a Palliative Care Team to augment the hospital's thirty-year-old Hospice program, in addition to the Senior Health Services department staffed by board-certified geriatricians and a state-of-the-art physical therapy program that includes a pool for aquatic therapy. Programs include a monthly "Breakfast Club" that offers a free healthy breakfast to seniors, simple stretching exercises, a speaker on some relevant subject, a "Medicare Moment" and equally important, the opportunity to socialize.

MORNINGSIDE GARDENS

Forty miles south of Kendal and only a bit inland from the Hudson is Morningside Gardens, a group of six high-rise apartment buildings in the Harlem area of Manhattan. Morningside Gardens is a middle-income cooperative housing complex in Morningside Heights, built with government assistance to house 2,000 individuals, which opened for occupancy in 1957. According to Ron Bruno, the Executive Director of Morningside Retirement & Health Services (MRHS), an agency established by residents within Morningside Gardens, the complex from the beginning welcomed diversity, including mixed-race and same-sex couples, and today its cultural diversity includes a significant Asian population. MRHS was formed by volunteers within the complex to serve people over 60,

but by 1986, it hired the first of its professional staff. The program, however, is still run primarily by Morningside Garden volunteers working with the professional staff.

In 1995, MRHS was designated by New York State as a NORC program: a Naturally Occurring Retirement Community. As such, the complex is eligible for funds from both the state and the city for its health programs.⁷⁸

The values of MRHS are stated as follows:

- Promoting a caring community and enriching community life;
- Preserving the dignity and human rights of older people;
- Promoting and supporting independence by actively involving individuals in managing their own care;
- Preventing isolation by keeping older residents connected to the larger Morningside Gardens community; and
- Reflecting integrity, professionalism, responsibility, warmth and respect, and a commitment to diversity.⁷⁹

The programs that actualize these values include dance and martial arts, book discussions and language classes, a political forum, a bridge club, and writing workshops, but nothing on spirituality. As with Kendal, my request to do my Demonstration Proposal at Morningside Gardens was warmly encouraged.

Morningside Gardens is a stone's throw from Columbia University, Barnard College, Jewish Theological Seminary, and Union Seminary, as well as the Manhattan School of Music. It is a short bus or subway ride from Times Square, the Broadway theater district, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, and the great museums of New York City. New

⁷⁸ Morningside Retirement and Health Services 2010 Annual Report, 1.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 2.

York City residents do not need to seek places to walk. Most New Yorkers, especially in Manhattan, walk as a way of life. But a walk with views is only two blocks away at Riverside Park, and only a bit further to Central Park. Houses of worship abound in this area, the two most notable being Riverside Church (also built with Rockefeller money) and the Episcopal Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, the largest Gothic church in the world.

Unlike the residents of Kendal on Hudson, the residents of Morningside Gardens live where their personal histories were written. All the members of my group had lived there for more than 30 years. Although not New York City's most luxurious housing by any means, its location, its values, and the high level of diversity even in the melting pot that is New York City make it a highly desirable place to live. One does not find real estate ads for co-ops in Morningside Gardens in The New York Times. One goes onto a waiting list of several years and hopes for the best.

Morningside Gardens offers contrast to Kendal in that it is

- urban rather than suburban;
- middle class rather than affluent;
- more diverse in its population;
- and, as I would discover, a place embedded with the history of its residents in contrast to the entirely new community of Kendal where residents leave the site of their history behind.

With the process and the setting in place, it is now time to meet the people at the center of this project. The next chapter will first deal with descriptions of spirituality, reflecting both published answers and responses from elders.

CHAPTER 6 DESCRIPTIONS OF SPIRITUALITY

*Why, then, do I kneel still
striking my prayers on a stone
heart? Is it in hope one
of them will ignite yet and throw
on its illumined walls the shadow
of someone greater than I can understand?*

—R.S. Thomas, *“The Empty Church”*

A member of my Site Team cautioned me, early in the degree process, to be sure to state my definition of “spirituality” as I researched the spiritual needs and gifts of elders. As I invited people to join me in this project, I used the simplest explanation I could think of for “spirituality,” one that would be as inclusive as possible because I sought the participation of both religious and non-religious people. I defined spirituality simply as the awareness that one is part of something greater than oneself.⁸⁰ That was a starting place, but as the groups and I wrestled with definitions, I realized that more research was needed.

The words “spiritual” and “spirituality” are trendy these days and, as such, are over-used and vague. People use “spiritual” to describe a positive, if unfocused, attribute of themselves. Nurses use it as a default diagnosis to refer patients to a chaplain if their pain is not specifically a nursing, medical, or social work issue. Colorful, sweet smelling shops carry the *accouterments* of new age spirituality like incense, amulets, and tokens to carry.

Spirituality is alive and well in American culture even if it is rather a shadowy thing. In my

⁸⁰ In fact, my project groups did indeed include one atheist and at least one agnostic. One group did deem the atheist to be “deeply spiritual,” by which he was flattered, but unconvinced. I’ve included his definition of spirituality near the end of this chapter.

own conversation, I try to avoid the words because inevitably, someone will ask what I mean by them and I have little chance of defining spirituality to the questioner's satisfaction. In fact, spirituality is such a slippery topic that no two people seem to agree on a definition. An illustration of the abuse of "spiritual" came recently from a woman who was being interviewed on network television before Hurricane Sandy hit the New York area. Although her beach community was under mandatory evacuation orders, she was determined to stay at home because to her, the storm was "a spiritual experience."

Nevertheless, despite the reasons given above, I have not found a better word to use in this project.

In the course of reading and research, however, I have come upon several definitions that challenged the simplicity of my own. Although this chapter was not included in my proposal, it was so important to the project that I felt it important to discuss the subject here, and to include some of the results of research.

DESCRIPTIONS OF SPIRITUALITY

Traditionally, spirituality was considered the *personal* aspect of one's religion, which is by nature *communal*, and the two—religion and spirituality—were inseparable. It wasn't until the 1960s that spirituality began to be spoken of outside the context of religion, encouraged by the growing disillusionment with institutional religious bodies. David Moberg describes it thus:

It (spirituality) gained more positive than negative connotations through its association with personal experience of the transcendent, while *religiousness* has tended to have more negative than positive connotations, partly because of connections with institutional religion, which some view as a hindrance to such experiences. *Spirituality* now is an 'in' word, even among groups such as the baby boomers who defected from conventional religions and turned to New

Age movements that emphasize direct spiritual experience and claim to be spiritual but not religious.⁸¹

Moberg wrote in the 1980s, but in 1902, William James was already parsing religious experience in his lectures, later published in his seminal *Varieties of Religious Experience*. James separated “religion” into two distinct categories: institutional and personal religion and his interest in *Varieties* was primarily in the latter.

Religion, there, as I now ask you arbitrarily to take it, shall mean for us *the feelings, acts, and experience of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine*. Since the relation may be either moral, physical, or ritual, it is evident that out of religion in the sense in which we take it, theologies, philosophies and ecclesiastical organizations may secondarily grow.⁸²

Even so, personal religion—spirituality—was tied to belief in a divine being. Does that mean that non-believers or non-theists, as some prefer to call themselves, have no spiritual dimension? Does it overlook their convictions if we call them “spiritual” beings? The jury is definitely deadlocked on those questions. Similar to the Lord’s Prayer, which is essentially a Jewish *Kaddish*⁸³ but not used by Jews because of its association with Christianity, so “spirituality” is resisted by many non-theists because of its relationship with religion.

The description that I ultimately found most useful for this project was that offered by the Rev. Jennifer L. Brower, a Unitarian-Universalist minister.

If we understand the ‘spirit’ to mean the animating or vital force within each person—‘spirit’ derived from the Latin *spiritus*, meaning ‘soul, courage, vigor, breath’—then the spirit is our vital center or our core. And the ‘spiritual’ are

⁸¹ David O. Moberg, *Aging and Spirituality: Spiritual Dimensions of Aging Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*. (New York: The Haworth Pastoral Press, 1981), 17.

⁸² William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. (New York: Collier MacMillan Publishers, 1961), 42.

⁸³ Lawrence Hoffman, *The Canonization of the Synagogue Service*. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 56.

those things which support that center; those things which enliven us and give us a sense of courage, or heart, for our living. Spiritual experiences are those events in life and moments in relationships which attune us to that vital or animating force within and which give greater meaning and depth to our day-to-day living.⁸⁴

Brower wisely (in my estimation) adds to her definition her belief that the nature of spirituality changes with age.

Naturally, that which moves the spirit, that which brings us deep meaning and satisfaction and enlivens us at 45 years of age may not be what nurtures our sense of wholeness and spiritual wellness at 93. So, in my view, the process of aging at every life stage brings about changes in one's spiritual life.⁸⁵

Robert C. Atchley, who has written extensively on spirituality and aging, agrees with Brower and notes that

The term *spirituality* refers to an inner field of human experience. It is a capacity that can grow enormously over time. Many of the most spiritually developed human beings are older men and women.⁸⁶

He goes on to describe it in more detail:

Spiritual experience can be both transcendent and immanent: It can be both an experience of transcending worldly concerns as well as an intense present-moment perception that the ground of all being permeates things. The essence of fully developed spirituality is an intense aliveness and deep sense of understanding that one intuitively comprehends as having come from a direct, internal link with that mysterious principle that connects all aspects of the universe. As fully awakened spiritual beings, we feel our interconnectedness.⁸⁷

Atchley here touches on that which several of the participants in my project noted about their own spirituality: connectedness. It could be to the cosmos, the community, to God

⁸⁴ Jennifer L. Brower, "Faith, Spirituality & Aging: An Interview with Rev. Jennifer L. Brower. Frontline (February 26, 2009). <http://pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/livinggold/etc/faith.html> (accessed February 2012).

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Robert C. Atchley, *Spirituality and Aging* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), ix.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 13.

or the faith group that worships God, but it is something that keeps the individual from being an entity entirely unto him- or herself. Going back to my original definition, spirituality is the awareness that *we are part of something greater than ourselves*. I would go as far as to say that the awareness of that connectedness is *vital* to every aspect of health!⁸⁸

In his study of the spirituality of baby boomers⁸⁹ Wade Clark Roof notes, as did James before him, the distinction between what he calls “firsthand and secondhand religion.” He expresses a criticism made increasingly often about modern religious practices, that what goes on inside churches and synagogues is alien and irrelevant to life as it is experienced outside.⁹⁰ He writes

The concern is to experience life directly, to have an encounter with God or the divine, or simply with nature and other people, without the intervention of inherited beliefs, ideas, and concepts. Such striving is understandable, not simply because secondhand religion can be empty of meaning, but because only personal experience is in some sense authentic and empowering.⁹¹

Philip Culbertson pushes that idea even further and adds a warning:

Human spirituality may also encompass gatherings of family or friends, a good physical workout, meditation upon a fine piece of art, the transformative experience of music, or the beauty of nature. Spiritual wholeness requires repeated awakening and deliberate nurturing of the spirit, for as any other part of the wholeness wheel can atrophy, so can one’s spirituality.⁹²

Finally, who is defining spirituality today? Religious bodies generally hold to their traditional views, but one of the major investigators of the nature, needs and manifestations

⁸⁸ The importance of connectedness raises a question that can only be posed in these present times: Are Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and the internet in general instruments of spirituality? I would have to admit that they are just that.

⁸⁹ Baby Boomers are the generation born between the 1946 post-war baby boom and 1964.

⁹⁰ This begs the question about whether that alienation is attributable to the characteristic individualism of the boomer generation or to the tenacity with which organized religion clings to its traditions.

⁹¹ Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation*. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 67.

⁹² Culbertson, 6.

of spirituality these days is the healthcare industry. For decades, various healers have used phrases like “wholeness” and “body, mind, and spirit” but the medical community has held firmly to scientific models that have not allowed for the vagueness of spirituality. In recent years, however, with the rise of professional healthcare chaplaincy with its several collaborative associations and their advocacy, plus the increased use of alternative medicine and the desire of patients to be treated as whole persons and not just “pieces of meat” (the description given to me 47 years ago just before I entered the hospital to give birth to my first child), spirituality has finally gone mainstream and is now included in multi-disciplinary plans of care. This reflects the industry’s awareness that a patient’s spiritual life is an important aspect of his/her coping system, as well as a growing acceptance of alternative treatments and the use of qualitative research and evidence-based approaches to patient care.⁹³ Even with that progress, the industry still struggles to wrap its clinical corporate mind around the concept of spirituality, and its language is stilted. The following are excerpts from the National Cancer Institute’s website, which does at least distinguish between “religion” and “spirituality.”

Religion can be viewed as a specific set of beliefs and practices associated with a recognized religion or denomination. Spirituality is generally recognized as encompassing experiential aspects, whether related to engaging in religious practices or to acknowledging a general sense of peace and connectedness. The concept of spirituality is found in all cultures and is often considered to encompass a search for ultimate meaning through religion or other paths. Within health care, concerns about spiritual or religious well-being have sometimes been viewed as an aspect of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM)...Religion is highly culturally determined; spirituality is considered a universal human capacity, usually—but not necessarily—associated with and expressed in religious practice....Spiritual well-being, particularly a sense of meaning and peace, is significantly associated with an ability of cancer patients to continue to enjoy life despite

⁹³ Augustine Meier, Thomas St. James O’Connor, Peter L. VanKatwyk, eds. *Spirituality & Health: Multidisciplinary Explorations*. (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 17.

high levels of pain or fatigue. Spiritual well-being and depression are inversely related.⁹⁴

In a 2005 book⁹⁵ that examines the opening of communications between healthcare science and religion, the editors note the dramatically increased volume of studies over the past 50 years that link spirituality and health.

Table 2: Quantity of Spirituality Research in Three Health Care Databases (1966–2003)⁹⁶

Year	Total Quantity of Spirituality Research in Three Health Care Databases for each time period
1966	21
1966–75	54
1976–80	72
1981–85	152
1986–90	285
1991–95	565
1996–99	1,147
2000–03	2,843*

Source: O'Connor et al., 2002.

*Note: 1966–99 had the duplicates removed from the three databases. Years 2000–2003 do not have the duplicates removed.

Perhaps because it tries too hard to synthesize information from many sources, the editors' attempts to define both spirituality and religion become circular.

⁹⁴ National Cancer Institute at the National Institutes of Health, "Spirituality in Cancer Care: Health Professional Version," [http://www.cancer.gov/canertopics/pdq/supportivecare/spirituality/HealthProfessionals/page 5,7](http://www.cancer.gov/canertopics/pdq/supportivecare/spirituality/HealthProfessionals/page%205,7) (Accessed July 6, 2012)

⁹⁵ Meier, 17.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 15.

At the heart of religion is the spiritual reality. In this context, spiritual means that which exceeds one utterly; the sacred; the ground of all being; the holy; the numinous; the Other. What constitutes religion (narrative, symbols, community) is intended to convey, express and hold this numinous reality. By definition, religion *includes* spirituality at the level of intention, if not always at the level of experience (Pargament, 1997). However since the spiritual reality, which religion tries to express and participate in, can never be fully contained by the religion, there can be spiritual activity outside the formal context of religion.⁹⁷

Is spirituality part of religion or is religion an aspect of spirituality? Their description, like that from the National Cancer Institute's, is clinical but ultimately not helpful to the spiritual seeker. The editors do, however, state more clearly their position that spirituality divorced from religion suffers.

Generally, it seems possible to say that religion references the values of tradition and communal experience, while spirituality references the novel and individual experience, the two aspects being two sides of a coin. When communal experience and individual experience are severed, both sides run the risk of developing a solipsistic perspective that references nothing outside itself. Although distinctions between religion and spirituality can be made, too much distinction creates distortion.⁹⁸

Although the example given above of the woman who opted to stay in the dangerous path of an on-coming hurricane because it was a "spiritual experience" is a good illustration of this distortion, I continue to lean toward the idea that spirituality *may* include religion, but it can and often *is* severed from religion. The premise on which the project workshop was based was that spirituality is *always* present in *every* person, whether or not it is acknowledged. Religion, however, is optional.

Moving now from the clinical to the poetic, can there be any greater expression of spirituality than Elizabeth Barrett Browning's magnificent sonnet wherein she knows herself, her very soul, involved in this all-encompassing love, this delirious

⁹⁷ Ibid., 28.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

connectedness? An argument can be made to abandon all the clinical and humanistic studies of spirituality and just attend to the poetic.

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints, —I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life! —and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.⁹⁹

And from the poetic to the personal: below are the answers given by some of the participants in my two project groups, as well as members of their communities who attended my initial presentation but did not participate in the project. The question posed on a questionnaire was, “What does spirituality mean to you?” They had only a short time to write their answers and had not been told they would be asked to answer this question.

From the Kendal group:

“Exploring, discerning, waiting, abiding in that which is Beyond Expression.”

“This place of peace and connection, the beauty of oceans, mountains, river, sunsets—and the beauty of people.”

“Our inner life and effort to connect to others and to God.”

“Out of myself.”

“A deep intellectual and emotional commitment to non-materialism.”

⁹⁹ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, “How Do I Love Thee?” in *The Art of Growing Older: Writers on Living and Aging*, ed. Wayne Booth (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 201-2.

“An awareness of one’s place in the world in which one is living, to understand their place in my life and share a part of one’s soul with those with whom one interacts.”

“Inner peace.”

“My identity with human community.”

“The search within to be connected to all throughout the universe and to God/Spirit within.”

“It is a ____ personal substitute for a God or metaphysic about our increasingly complex and mysterious _____ usually involving formal relationship with a faith, church or creedal group.”

From members of the Kendal community who attended my initial presentation, but did not participate in the project group:

“Being in touch with myself; being aware of what I am feeling and rectifying what does not feel good. Being in touch with my surroundings, be it indoors or outdoors, and particularly enjoying the wonderment of nature, man’s creations, etc. Recognizing that I live in a huge universe where things happen beyond my control, letting go of the idea that I can control and going with the flow of things.”

“Believing in and accepting grace.”

“The sense of something beyond self, something more basic and important, and the quest to deepen understanding and faith.”

“All of the issues you stated.”

“Very important—hard to describe.”

“Too complicated to talk about.”

“Not sure. For me it is connected with religious practice.”

“A relationship with something larger than I can comprehend.”

“Innermost feelings which occasion our well-being toward ourselves and others.”

“Need to think about before answering topic.”

“Feeling beyond me, out to what’s around—people, other creatures, beauty, ugliness—awareness.”

“Spirituality is divine guidance.”

“Not much. Too vague a word.”

“Commitment to a religion.”

From the Morningside Gardens project group:

“Feeling a connection to a power greater than yourself.”

“Deeper awareness—more understanding—security and freedom.”

“That your spirit is always with you and you are guided by it.”

“Not what it does to you. For me, your spirituality is ‘life adjustment.’ To me, spirituality occurred when, 50 years ago when I was a young man doing extremely well, really well, everything seemed to shimmer and dissolve into a grand illusion.” (NOTE: This person, Nimrod for purposes of this thesis, describes himself as an atheist and when pushed, describes spirituality simply as “an irrational, nonobjective concept.”)

From Members of the Morningside Gardens community who did not participate in the project group:

“Believing there is a deep feeling of another inner person in us who guides us daily in all that we do.”

“Connect with my religious faith. A God who is part of all and especially in the space between us.”

“An inner being, the thoughtful, reflection, the wanting to be ethical, to learn, to be a good person, to think of others not just yourself.”

“Something beyond this world—beyond understanding. ”

“To me, Spirituality means being spiritually, emotionally connected with others or situations. It also means having strong positive feelings.”

These respondents point out several things about the nature of spirituality, albeit in less literate ways than the writers quoted above them. Spirituality is internal; it is about connectedness (to God, to a faith tradition, to other people) and it is difficult to define, especially on short notice. As elusive as it is, however, these respondents, with the one exception, did not question that it is real.

The next chapter describes the workshop itself: six sessions with the concept of spirituality hanging in the air. We talked about it and around it, never quite pinning it down but always including it at the table.

CHAPTER 7 WISDOM-MAKING: THE WORKSHOPS

*Now I become myself. It's taken
Time, many years and places;
I have been dissolved and shaken,
Worn other people's faces,
Run madly, as if Time were there,
Terribly old, crying a warning.
"Hurry, you will be dead before—"
(What? Before you reach the morning?
Or the end of the poem is clear?
Or love safe in the walled city?)
Now to stand still, to be here,
Feel my own weight and density!*

—May Sarton, "Now I become myself"

And here we come to the heart of the matter. All the experience, the passion, the research, the planning and proposing, the schedules and signed forms—all of it preparation for the main event: turning the idea over to two groups of people, who were both self-selected and chosen, to see what they would carve out of it. This chapter will describe the workshops, session by session. Because each group built on its own experience, the two workshops will be described separately rather than presenting session one in both Kendal and Morningside Gardens, then session 2, and so forth. What follows are only the highlights, meant to present each person and the sense of each session. Also, in the Kendal group, neither attendance nor completion of written materials was consistent, so not every person is mentioned for each session.

KENDAL

Session #1: Although the members of the group knew each other and had seen and heard me at the initial presentation, this was the first time we interacted face to face. I asked them to introduce themselves by choosing a bird that they would want to be, should they be reincarnated as a bird, then to explain their choice to the group. The group members and their birds were:

Brendan: a bluebird because they bring beauty.

Dorothy: a sea gull because they hang out near water.

Julie: a parrot because they are so colorful.

Terri: a seagull because they are survivors; they're tenacious and tough.

Marisa: (traveling; not present at first session) a sea gull because it stays near water.

Martin: (traveling; not present at first session) an eagle because it's strong and smart. It makes its environment what it wants it to be.

Cindy:

Sigrid: a mockingbird because they're so theatrical. (Her first career choice was acting.)

Stewart: a robin because he watches them from his window; in this season, they are busy copulating. (Note: Stewart's wife, Ingeborg, had been accepted into the group and he came with her at the first session, although he and I had not spoken beforehand. His wife did not participate further in the group because of the onset of serious health issues and Stewart's participation was limited by severe hearing loss.)

Ingeborg: A flicker because of a memory of the mystical experience of watching a flock of flickers rise into the air.

Facilitator: a loon, spending her life on a clear, secluded mountain lake, singing day and night, with only carefully chosen close friends and family members for company.

Session #2: Again, we did not have full attendance. In fact, only one person in nine attended all six sessions and did all the assignments. We began this session talking about spirituality: what it was, what it meant to be “spiritual.” There was general agreement that everyone contained within himself or herself a spiritual nature, but they had difficulty accepting that one could indeed be spiritual without being religious. This conversation would continue in future sessions.

This was the session to focus on their spiritual autobiographies, which each of those who did the assignment wrote as their history of involvement in *religion*. Three people read their stories as written, one person drew a wheel to separate the major segments of her life and told her story extemporaneously, and still another person gave me a fourteen-page single-spaced detailed autobiography but spoke to the group only about influential people in his life. Between the first and second sessions, a long telephone conversation with one participant had clarified how much he wanted to divulge to the rest of the group.

Their stories:

Terri spoke about growing up as a practicing Catholic, attending a convent school before going to a Catholic college to earn a business degree. As secretary to the chairman of the company she worked for, she counseled people fired in mergers and became aware that relating to and serving others was important to her. Eventually, she became an associate of the Order of Divine Compassion, the nuns who had educated her, and they remained her primary link to a Catholic Church that had become too conservative for her tastes. “Do I believe in God? I do. Do I believe in Rome? I don’t.” She attended mass at Kendal with a

priest, a former prison chaplain and now Catholic visitor to Phelps Hospital, who shared her views. She maintained contact with the nuns and in fact, later in the workshop when instructed to plan her funeral, she did so with their help.

Cindy, a Holocaust survivor, began by dissociating herself from the word “spirituality” as something connected to church or at least, formal religion, “evoking clouds of purity and freedom from material concerns, including sexual desire and other passions.” None of that appealed to her. She talked of being Jewish in Nazi Germany and having been “cast out” with her parents, who then continued as “totally secular, making no effort to affiliate” with either a Jewish congregation or any other religious community. In a brief paragraph that took our breath away, *Cindy* described an incident in her freshman year in college, when a distinguished rabbi came to talk to Jewish students about the religion’s imperatives.

He was mesmerizing! In the Q & A I got up my courage to ask whether someone like me, who had had no Jewish instruction and attended no services on a regular basis, could consider herself a Jew. The rabbi of great renown had a one-word answer, ‘NO.’ Nothing more, no hint of a path to redemption. So that was that.

She spoke about “poking around in various religions” after that, including two years’ instruction in Buddhism, before finding the faith community that she gratefully still regarded as home: a Unitarian Universalist meeting practically in her own back yard. She lived too far from it now to participate regularly and hoped to find another UU fellowship closer when she settled into Kendal. Her spiritual moments now were a sense of connectedness to the universe and all its suffering creatures, human and not.

Brendan grew up in the Great Depression in a family where education was not highly valued, and he served in the Navel Air Force in the Korean Conflict. He was stationed in

Japan, where he became close friends with a Japanese family whose pictures he still carried with him. Leaving them had been devastating; his love for them and his separation from them were critical pieces of his personal myth. After his military service, he entered a Catholic seminary and developed a passion for bridging the gap between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. He left the seminary, earned Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Education, taught for awhile, then moved on to investing, using contacts in Eastern Europe and Russia. Since his marriage, he and his wife had been active members of the Episcopal Church, Brendan being particularly involved in the liturgical commission of the Diocese of New York. His outlook on life was optimistic, his faith in God strong, and he firmly believed that we work out our salvation in community.

Sigrid's spiritual autobiography was short but significant for the group. She related how she was baptized in the Congregational Church, spent a good part of her young life in the Lutheran Church, and then moved back to the Congregational Church for the sake of her children's religious experience. An articulate and passionate liberal throughout adulthood, she was enjoying having time to read and reflect. This is her closing paragraph, the last sentence of which she was hesitant to speak aloud, but which would be echoed by other group members privately in the follow-up interviews.

Now my faith journey seems to be taking some new directions—more cosmic in flavor than prayerful, more community oriented than personal, and I'm happy with that. And there is spirituality in facing the "end" questions with new and old friends, which also makes me happy and content. I still love nature, and relish my memories of skiing and fishing, and roaming the woods with my father and my children. I respond "spiritually" to good music and poetry and now I find additional high moments with my children and grandchildren. Life is good. Death is O.K. The cosmos is awesome, and God is?

Stewart, the only Quaker in our group, gave me his fourteen pages, which dealt with a particular period in his life for which he had retained personal diaries, but it was less about

him than about the people he encountered in America and in Europe. When he did speak about himself, however, he said only what seemed to be a strong theme for his life. He said the one way he could make up for not doing more in the war was to be a bridge-builder.

Julie ultimately missed half of the six sessions because of travel, but presented her story when she returned. She was born in Germany to a Jewish mother and a “dissident” father who were not affiliated with any religious institution. She clearly remembered her mother’s taking her away from situations that would have marked her as a Jew and therefore different, including changing schools. In England, her first marriage ended in divorce, and in her second marriage, to a man she loved deeply, she joined a synagogue and stayed until his death. At this point in her life, she vacillated between recognizing the existence of God “but not in any formal way,” and considering herself an agnostic. She closed her autobiography with, “I believe in Peace and harmony.”

Marisa was deep into the process of finishing her memoirs when the group began, so her materials came in later. She had grown up in France, in a French Huguenot family with strong ties to the church, including several family members who were clergy. She was strongly influenced by the faith and leadership of her uncle, a pacifist minister. She always knew she wanted to care for other people; one of her strongest values is the “importance of, and devotion to, friends and relatives” and giving of herself to them.

Martin did not engage the process of writing his autobiography, which may well have generated new insights for him, but simply summarized it verbally from the initial survey he did fill out. A theme that came up for him again and again in the workshop was his appreciation of Christian mystics and the spiritual enrichment given by meditation. Both Martin and Marisa, a married couple, had completed (at separate times) a two-year program

in spiritual direction, The Guild for Spiritual Guidance, at Mariandale retreat center in near-by Ossining. Both consciously lived their faith; both lamented the lack of a faith community.

While I was disappointed that the commitment I thought everyone understood before we began was, in fact, less binding than I'd hoped it would be, what we did discuss and discover together more than made up for it. As trust increased among us, so did the depth of insight and self-revelation. Our gatherings increasingly felt like Holy Ground.

Session #3: In preparation for this important session on forgiveness, they were asked to write down three ways in which they needed to forgive themselves and three ways they needed to forgive others. They were asked to “enter” each situation they listed as their present, elderly self to stand beside their younger self and offer support. If they could imagine it, they might also devise a ritual that would help with reconciliation.

They also had a journal article to read, one that presented findings that the ability to forgive directly impacted on mortality.¹⁰⁰ Their lists would be for their personal use only, not to be shared with the group unless they so desired. What we would discuss was the process of forgiveness. Here are some of their comments:

“As we age, forgiveness becomes more important, but it remains difficult.”

“It helps to write it down, but it still feels hard.”

“The timing...I was meeting with other Berliners...It was difficult meeting with a colleague who was in the Hitler Youth. How can one forgive someone whose harm was done to others? It must come from God. No one can forgive Hitler and others.”

“Age softens you unless you bear some terrible burden.” (Her father was “wild and difficult.”) “Time heals wounds, but it depends on your own maturity.”

¹⁰⁰ Loren L. Toussaint, Amy D. Owen, Alyssa Cheadle. “Forgive to Live: Forgiveness, Health, and Longevity.” *Behavioral Medicine* 35, no. 4 (2011): 375–86.

One person pointed out that a pacifist offers “forgiveness in advance.”

Only one person, Stewart, wrote out what he thought because it was obviously easier to do that than join in discussion because of his acute hearing loss. The challenge for this session had forced him to confront a grudge he was holding against family members on whose advice he and his wife had made a decision that proved to be disastrous. He decided to transfer his anger to a government official who had, years ago, made decisions for which Stewart’s grandchildren will pay the price. More than any of us, perhaps, Stewart was conscious that even six degrees of separation could not quell the impact of one person’s action on an entire community.

This subject had reached down into their guts even further than their experience of writing their spiritual autobiographies. This was hard. One person compared it to a twelve-step meeting and said it was made easier by knowing that others in the group were engaged in the same painful process and would understand how he felt. “It was encouraging to know that the listeners (the group) would understand.”

Session #4: This would be the last session of looking back, but this time the hindsight celebrated their accomplishments and the wisdom gained. The homework had asked them to name their legacies. What had the world—both vast and intimate—gained because they had lived? What passion had been generated by their experience that they wanted to pass on? What were the values gleaned from their legacies? They were also to write at least the beginnings of an ethical will.

We spent a few minutes watching a scene from the film, “Dirty Dancing,” that directly applied to legacy, but between computer glitches and the group’s lack of interest,

nothing was gained by it. The group members wanted to talk and listen to one another. Their own stories trumped anything Holly- or Bollywood produced.

Julie's message to the people she named—each person was asked to name those who might receive their ethical will—was to act according to your conscience, to do the best you can, to stay independent, and to be as fair as possible. She wished she had demonstrated her love more to loved ones, especially with hugs.

Martin wrote that he stood for constancy, hard work, persistence, helpfulness, and acceptance. In his life he fought for fairness and equal treatment. He found not accepting responsibility for one's actions absolutely unacceptable. To those who followed, he recommended the importance of study, the desire to work hard, the willingness to defer gratification, and the ability to save money. The Protestant Work Ethic was active in his life, side by side—comfortably—with the Catholic mystics who inform his spiritual life!

Stewart's usual scholarly report dealt with the Friends and their values, which by implication, were also his own.

To us, God represents both the basic unity of the universe, over against polytheism or mere chance, and our personal and collective responsibility in this nuclear age is to care for the earth and our fellow-humans. From Jesus we learn to extend and deepen the intense love we feel within our own families, that takes us beyond self-love, to all sorts and conditions of men and women, and to come personally to God, even amid galaxies and tsunamis, as a loving Father.

Marisa said this was what she has stood for: faithfulness and love of family and friends; openness to the needs of others; being very reliable; the need to express love; honesty and truth; and independence. At this point in her life, she was trying to put aside “shackles” to work toward a more “realized” life. Unacceptable to her were deceitfulness,

unreliability, lies, and manipulativeness. She added that this process of articulating meaning and values had only just begun for her, even though she had just completed her memoirs.

Brendan did not do this exercise, saying he had no particular desire to be remembered. He questioned whether young people really want to know about our lives. In response, Martin noted that what the first generation seeks to forget, the second generation tries to recover. A present day example of that is the common need of World War II veterans to talk about their war experience, many of them for the *first* time. They sought to forget, unsuccessfully as it turned out, and now younger generations are trying to capture their memories for posterity.

Sigrid wrote about the important themes in her life: music of all sorts and choral participation in it; people who inspired or affirmed her; books that transformed her; nature and the sports that took her outdoors to enjoy it. She had fought for abortion rights, clean water, and equality for women. She had worked with the League of Women Voters, the ASPCA and for the ERA. She had lived the life of a “liberal” and she despised “isms” of any sort. Her ethical will described her beautifully:

In everything that has happened to me in 83 years, it’s my instinct to see things first as funny/humorous/incongruous that has kept me on my feet....
Hold close some essential personal “truths”: fairness, truth-telling, and willingness to listen to others without immediate judgment.
Grudges are a waste of soul-time.
Have dogs or other pets around. They inform your humanity and love you a lot.
Tell stories, your own and those about your relatives, past and present. Keeping ancestors around for company keeps you connected to family in subtle ways.
Nobody loves a complainer. Complainers don’t have time to love.
Play Games. These are great opportunities to relate to others in fun ways.
Read lots of books and poetry: Keep in touch with the world of art and literature; there are many lessons and inspirations there. I’m glad to say, I’ve read a lot.
Exploring your sense of the cosmic, your spirituality, the meaning of your life and “life” in general is essential for a satisfactory or fulfilled “elder” life.

Session #5: Planning our dying and death made for lively discussion! *Martin*, for instance, was adamant that planning his funeral should be left to his survivors. After all, it was for them; he'd be dead and gone. Nothing could convince him otherwise, even the testimony of this writer that families often agonized over burial choices, wishing they knew the wishes of the deceased. He finally agreed that he would raise the issue with one of his daughters, and subsequently reported back that, much to his surprise, she very much wanted him to name his preferences. Martin seemed a bit annoyed that she would abdicate her responsibility so easily. He also noted that the question on their homework assignment sheet that asked what clothing they wanted to be buried in was a question only a woman could ask!

Not surprisingly, the conversation turned to our children and what kind of funeral or memorial service would be comforting to them. The parents in the group admitted that they didn't know what their children actually *believed!* This session was shortly before Easter, when families would be gathering together. Some of us determined to bring up the subject at Easter dinner, but we never did report on whether or not we had, or the results of such conversations.

Terri had taken the assignment as an opportunity to reconnect with her nuns to make them part of her planning. Near death, she wanted to be surrounded by family and as much laughter as possible. She wanted to die in the open air, or at least by an open window and hoped for a last view of the ocean and the clear night sky at the family home on Fire Island. She wanted to hear familiar voices and the "soulful horn of Chet Baker." After death, she trusted that she would be in God's hands and she wanted to renew relationships with those who had touched her life. She hoped "that the natural world (would be) even more marvelous than on earth." Her greatest fear, however, was that there would be no hereafter. She also

hoped that when she died, she would not “leave undone some important actions in various personal relationships.” At her death, there would be a memorial service in a church, with a childhood friend speaking of their lifelong friendship, and her body would go to New York Medical College in “thanksgiving for saving my life.” When her ashes were returned to her family three years later, she wanted them to be buried in a cardboard box, along with a copy of a poem written by Marisa (“Come Walk With Me”) at the family gravesite in the dunes on Fire Island.

Marisa feared suffering before death, and if possible, she wanted to be able to see the ocean as she is dying. She would be cremated, and her ashes were to be spread at sea.

Sigrid wrote a long obituary, ending with, “She will be remembered for her humor, liberality, love of dogs, her general good nature and humility. And she will be treasured as the ‘parental unit’ who managed a family, a career, and fun.” As she lay dying, she wanted to be surrounded by “family, photos, dogs, books, music, funny stories, blue sky, games.” She chose to see “trees, hills, family, favorite movies, books.” She only feared pain before dying and after death, anticipated “nothing.” She was not impressed by after-death fantasies. Her service would be at Scarsdale Congregational Church, her son, Robert, would speak, and the music would include Charles-Marie Widor’s joyful “Toccata in F” as a postlude, as well as Johannes Brahms’s “How Lovely is Thy Dwelling Place” and some George Shearing jazz piano. For special effects, “I would love a rainbow!”

Julie, in contrast, wanted a “no-fuss” dying and death—cremation and a graveside service. In addition to a natural desire not to be in pain at the end of her life, she also feared that she would “linger like my sister, can’t see, can’t hear—totally isolated.” And after death? “I hope to meet up with my husband.”

Session #6: This final meeting came too soon for most of us. Each one of the weekly assignments had opened subjects that encouraged deep reflection and intense discussion, and we never seemed to have enough time. This last questionnaire was three pages of probing questions and most of the participants took them very seriously—except for one question: *“What is still in your Bucket List?”* Only Sigrid knew what a Bucket List was!

Certain themes ran through all their answers: The need to be closer to and do more for other people, be they neighbors, family, or friends. Their regrets were almost universally that they did not love enough or work hard enough at relationships. Forgiveness issues were still in process for most of them. Continuing to grow was an on-going theme, the desire for which had brought most of them to Kendal, where continued growth was encouraged.

Brendan made an acute observation: “We’re working out our salvation in this community.” Kendal was more than their address. It was a way of life they had signed on for that was separate and different from the way of life they left behind. It was a community of people they did not choose, but who were now the witnesses to this last phase of their lives. And the men and women in this group, although each had committed to work on his or her own story and spirituality, had also accepted the role of witness to one another and those two roles became equal in importance.

MORNINGSIDE GARDENS

Although the same process was offered to the Morningside Gardens group, their experiences differed in important ways. The first had to do with location. Morningside Gardens was their home, as was New York City, and had been for at least three decades. It was well integrated into their life experience, unlike the Kendal group members who were still processing what the move to Kendal meant for them.

The second difference was that each member of this group was diligent in doing the written work in detail, or carefully preparing for each session mentally and emotionally. Thus, we had more material to work with than in the Kendal group, and everyone in the group was fully present and actively participatory at each session.

Session #1: As I did with the Kendal group, I opened the first session with the birds exercise and *immediately* realized how much less useful it was for these folks. Joanne commented that living in the city, she simply didn't know much about birds other than pigeons, and neither she nor Simone chose a bird. Harriet chose the bluebird because she remembered how much she used to love the old song, "Bluebird of Happiness."¹⁰¹ Nimrod made what was perhaps the most self-aware choice of any of the thirteen project participants: he chose the parrot because it was colorful and proud to be so.¹⁰²

Session #2: At this session, in Nimrod's studio, they presented their spiritual autobiographies.

Simone, who grew up in the U.K., began her story by describing her grandparents, her parents and their foibles, and her desperate need to break away from an intrusive mother who had no respect for boundaries. Nursing was the way to do that and as difficult as the training was (long hours, horrid conditions, and sexual harassment), she continued on to train in midwifery, then psychiatric training in the hospital that was once Bedlam, followed by training in a psycho-analytic approach. She was not religious, but read for inspiration and

¹⁰¹ At the beginning of the second session, I played a clip of the original "Bluebird of Happiness" sung by Jan Peerce, which I had found on YouTube. Harriet was delighted!

¹⁰² Nimrod had requested that I visit him in his studio before the group began so he could show me his work and, I assume, he could be assured that I would not be shocked by it. Much of his livelihood has been earned photographing nude women in beautiful, natural poses. His studio walls are covered with his work. He also told the other three members of the group about his studio before they agreed to hold the second session there, and requested that each of them come for the same tour he gave me before the first session. While we all agreed it was not what we would hang on our own walls, not one of us was shocked.

particularly liked Ralph Waldo Emerson and Paul Tillich. At one point in her life, she found herself in Belize, was married for a short time, and adopted a native baby that was literally handed to her. With a child and no visible means of support, and weighed down by anxiety, she prayed, “If there is a God, for heaven’s sake, Show Me!” Her anxiety melted away and she felt a new peace within which she could cope. It only lasted thirty minutes or so, but it was an experience that would stay with her—and raise questions—for the rest of her life. She eventually got a divorce, legally adopted her son in this country, and went on to earn an Ed.D. at Columbia University in Health Education. Religion was still not useful, but spiritual questions arose: Why am I here? What am I supposed to be doing? Philosophy and Tillich helped, and through her son, she eventually found her way to Riverside Church. She wrote, “God is in relation, in the space between persons, intro-psychic in our relationship to ourselves, and in the awe in our relationship to nature.” Simone remarried at sixty-three and she worked hard—of necessity—to make this marriage succeed. Riverside Church and its excellent preaching, especially during the current interim, fed her spirit but she was still not altogether sure what she believed about God. And that was all right.

Harriet’s story was about family, an unshakable and constant theme of her life. An African American, she grew up in Harlem as one of five daughters of a wise and loving mother whose spirit Harriet felt with her every day. She was raised Catholic, attended parochial school, and never found a reason not to be a practicing Catholic. Even today, although she strongly disagreed with Church policy, she attended mass regularly. When told one Sunday by a fellow parishioner that Cardinal Dolan was going to ask them to sign a petition for something Harriet disagreed with, she responded, “I hope not. I don’t want to have to argue on the Church steps. It would ruin my Sunday!” Harriet married, had a son and

a daughter, and lived for a few years in her husband's home state of Virginia. Eventually they separated and she returned to her relieved and welcoming family circle with her children. She lamented that she is the last one left of her family, having buried both parents and four sisters. The love of family came through in everything Harriet said throughout the workshop.

Nimrod chose his own pseudonym, naming himself for the “mighty hunter before the Lord” in Genesis 9:10, despite the fact that he did not believe in God and described himself as an atheist. Philosophy filled the role of religion for him: Stoicism, Existentialism, Heidegger, German Idealism. Shortly after the workshop ended, *Nimrod* published his 360-page memoir, *Bloody But Unbowed*, and having already recalled and committed his life to print, he was easily able to describe it in detail to the group. In his spiritual autobiography, he touched on a series of mental breakdowns he suffered as a young adult, periods of living on the street, psychiatric treatment that helped not at all, and that which eventually did. More would come out as the group progressed. *Nimrod* was honest about wanting to tell his story and have others bear witness.

Joanne began her story with the hard work that she had done in recent years to deepen her faith—she attended a local Episcopal Church with generous pastoral care—and overcame the lingering effects of being the child of self-absorbed parents. She talked about her love of the arts: of Russian novelists, Bach's “B-Minor Mass” and Mozart's “Requiem,” and the choreography of Jerome Robbins. At the end, she summarized personal accomplishments for which she was thankful: the ability to face up to both her strengths and weaknesses; a growing ability to forgive; the ability to set emotional boundaries; and, learning that there was value in all creation, “even the difficult people of this world.”

The nature of the stereotypical New Yorker is to be forthcoming, to expect little in the way of privacy, to both trust and distrust quickly, and to be ready to like and assist other people. The MG group met the stereotype in all ways and by the time Session #2 was finished, we had established a foundation for an enjoyable and intense group experience.

Session #3: This session on forgiveness was as painful in preparation for this group as it had been for the Kendal group.

Harriet chose not to write anything for this session, explaining that she worked at forgiveness as things came up. Asked by the group why she was not as angry as many African Americans about the many ways her people had been badly treated, she recalled having recently told her son—her college-educated, sophisticated son—that he should not wear a hoodie to go running in Morningside Park after dark. It was not safe; he would be a target for the police. She acknowledged that many African Americans are still very angry, but her nature was to live by love and common sense, not anger. “Everyone is not going to like you, and you are not going to like everyone. Leave those people alone.”

Joanne admitted that dealing with forgiveness had been “very, very painful,” but she gained “great insights” and ultimately, it was “fruitful.” Although I had not asked them to do so, Joanne, along with Nimrod and Simone, had listed and gave me copies of their forgiveness tasks. Joanne listed very specific people and events, but surprisingly, did not mention her parents’ needing her forgiveness. She added that one “must be careful that memories don’t drop you into a serious depression.” She was right, of course, but as the instigator of this project, the remark concerned me.

Simone began by forgiving herself for not being loving enough to herself. She then went on to write a short letter to five people (out of seven she named needing forgiveness

from her). At the end of those honest letters, she wrote “Enough already !!!!” She then wrote out most of the words to one of Christianity’s most beloved hymns as her final word.

Dear Lord and Father of mankind, forgive our foolish ways!
Re-clothe us in our rightful mind, in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence, praise!

O Sabbath rest by Galilee, O calm of hills above
where Jesus knelt to share with thee the silence of eternity
interpreted by love!

Drop thy still dews of quietness till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress, and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire thy coolness and thy balm;
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire, speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire
O still, small voice of calm.¹⁰³

Nimrod acknowledged that despite having carefully and thoroughly written his autobiography, he had not considered the topic of forgiveness. He began by discussing his parents, the subject of which was not important enough to come up in any other context in the workshop (in sharp contrast to his group-mates). He was physically taken care of as a child, but not prepared in any way to face the world as an adult. They could have done much better, as could the Freudian psychiatrist who, as *Nimrod* put it, “drove me insane.”

Forgiving himself was more troubling and he named several instances, from hamster abuse to bad behavior in relationships that need forgiving. However, having named his “sins,” he then discussed, in writing, ways to atone for them, acts of kindness and generosity that could well be considered rituals to atone for each regrettable experience. Some of what he named he was already doing, such as giving an air mattress and floor space to Swarthmore students who needed it to atone for his unkind treatment of a fellow student when he attended

¹⁰³ Words by John Greenleaf Whittier (1807–1892).

that college. Nimrod claimed to be able to “care for” others, but because of his loveless childhood, not to “love” them. He also claimed throughout the workshop that he was not a “spiritual” being. The rest of the group told him emphatically that both were far from the truth. He made it necessary for us to define more deeply the words he refused to accept for himself.

Session #4: For this session, the group focused on legacy and ethical wills.

Joanne first named the three places in her life that provided safety and, in various ways, the opportunity for self-discovery and new behavior models: high school, an employment situation, and her current Episcopal parish. She said she stood for respect for the worthiness and dignity of each person, appreciated friendship based on mutuality and reciprocity, and cooperation and fair treatment in the workplace. She found particular qualities to be unacceptable: meanness and bullying, exploitation, failure to honor boundaries, and friendships that take one for granted. *Joanne’s* ethical will began with a quote from Zora Neale Hurston, “There are the years that ask the questions and years that answer.” She requested that her seven nieces and nephews, the appointed recipients of her will, do the following: look past the messiness and see the beauty in life; find your own special path to inner peace; become yourself, the person you were meant to be; pay attention to your inner self and know what you need. This list was followed by a list of specific tasks to help them achieve each recommendation.

Harriet again did not write her ideas, but was clear about what she stood for and against. Important to her were education, happy times, humor, domestic chores shared, being very positive, optimistic, and loving, and working on relationships with family, including in-laws. She also named respect for other’s beliefs, the Golden Rule, and willingness to help

each other, even with criticism. She had little patience for people who lie and steal, and for meanness in general.

Nimrod wrote that he stood for creativity and free expression—“Build on people’s ideas, don’t parrot them”; peer support as opposed to authoritative support; openness toward sex and comprehensive sex education; wide latitude for sexual expression; reason above all; care for Nature; and care for those you know. He detested “violence, bigotry, sexual repression, unreason, and the profit motive. “I am a Socialist.” His ethical will reflected the same. He wanted to pass on respect for all persons, young and old, of whatever condition and animals, where possible; sexual freedom, for young and old; for reason; for autonomy.

Simone wrote about how important she felt it was that people receive proper care—a justice issue—and she noted how important relationships were to her. Cruelty in *any* form was unacceptable to her and she wanted to pass on “the importance of being open-minded, communicating and listening and clarifying issues.” She included this extraordinarily wise statement:

“Love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart, mind and spirit and thy neighbor as thy *self*.” That word “self” is so infinitely complex and we only learn who we are through relationships in ever-expanding circles throughout life.

Session #5: We went on to work on our dying and death.

Nimrod wanted to die in his studio surrounded by his photos and his music, and ideally, watching “sunrise on Mars.” He had written out detailed instructions for his funeral years ago: the funeral should be held in his studio and must *not* mention “God.” The officiant was to be one of his former models, specific classical music would be played, and Greek delicacies would be served. A video of his young models should be shown as an affirmation of life. His tombstone should be inscribed with the Roman Stoic grave inscription:

I WAS NOT

I WAS

I AM NOT

I CARE NOT

His obituary should include the following quote: “‘Nimrod’ lived fully, suffered greatly, worshipped beautiful women. His photography will attest to that. Didn’t worship anything else. Wrote a memoir for his survivors. Would have liked to skydive more.” After death, his greatest hope was for oblivion. He had seen enough suffering in his life and didn’t want to take a chance on anymore of it. “But if there is something, I want to go to George Bernard Shaw’s (atheist) Hell, where everybody has a good time. (cf. ‘Man and Superman.’)”

Harriet wanted a simple Catholic Mass of Christian Burial in a church, celebrated by a priest. The *only* one of thirteen workshop participants to specify what she would wear when she was buried, she chose “a nice dress and earrings.” She would like to die surrounded by family, seeing the people who had gone before her, and her greatest hope was that after death, she would meet her family and friends. In lieu of flowers, she would prefer contributions be made to the New York Coalition of 100 Black Women’s Mentor Program.

Simone wanted to die at home, surrounded by color (her favorite scarfs) and books, especially her Tillich collection. She wanted to see the sunrise and sunset from her terrace and hear the voices of people “full of respect for the business of dying.” After death she hoped to know “that the experience of living was meaningful and left a mark; that my finite self be received into infinity and that it be marked with graciousness.” Her funeral would be a Service of Remembrance at Riverside Church and include readings from Walt Whitman (“A Noiseless Patient Spider”) and Martin Buber. Afterward, attendees would enjoy “lots of

good food, and Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald music will be playing softly.” She would be placed in a simple wooden box, wearing a simple cotton shift, and cremated. In her obit, she wrote of herself:

She continued struggling to understand Tillich’s writings up until her death, meeting others equally influenced by him. It allowed religion to be stripped of its dogma and beliefs that went against Science and even held up the hope that all disciplines are ultimately connected to the Ground of Being.

Joanne expressed no preferences for her funeral, feeling it is up to her survivors to choose what they would like. While dying, she only wanted to be in a clean, quiet setting with something live growing nearby. What she did *not* want was to have any negative or self-centered people around her. Her only fear of dying was that she would not have lived the life she wanted. She noted that she had “no special hopes for the unknowable after-death experience. My focus is on being my best self in this life.” Her obit included the fact that she actually read *Crime and Punishment* in Russian!

The final survey and the last session with this group are difficult to summarize. There was so much wisdom, so much growth, and so much inspiration!

Simone acknowledged this as a time of spiritual growth in her life, especially with the help of the profound sermons of the interim minister at Riverside Church. Her quest right now was to answer those big, meaning questions for herself, “To build a ‘map’ of what it means to be human. Why are we here? What are we supposed to be doing? Where will we go or will we just fizzle out as just a meaningless natural phenomenon?” Her own life had been a courageous journey and “courage” was what she most wanted to recommend to others. She loved food preparation and serving, writing and listening to poetry, beautiful music, Tillich, and her son—of whom she is justly proud. Still in her Bucket List? “I am told that I have a gift for writing. I would like to write something significant.”

If each person in this group were to be described in one word, albeit unfairly because they are each richly complex persons, the word for Simone would be “courage.” And for Harriet, it would be “love.” She learned love from her mother, experienced love among her sisters, knows what it means to be loved by God, and offers love to everyone around her. She was no Pollyanna; she was realistic:

(Know) that the journey through life is not easy, and you must keep trying to achieve your goals. Life changes and you must learn to change with it for the good. Always expect the best in people and that is what you will receive. As you move ahead, have a positive approach to the unknown and give your best.

Her relationship with God was strong and reinforced with daily prayer and meditation. Her spiritual attitude was thankfulness. And her Bucket List?

- To travel across this country by train or bus;
- To complete all of my unfinished needlework;
- To organize all my pictures;
- To find time to read more books.

Nimrod's word would surely be “creativity,” because that was his gift, the gift that had drawn him out of mental illness, provided a livelihood, and brought him into communities of like-minded people. His passion at the moment was to teach others, younger people primarily, that they *can* survive adversity, *should* be free to express and create, and *must* find something of their own that they can offer to the world. He vehemently denied that he is a spiritual being or that God exists. He will pursue the concept of a Ground of Being because that is a philosophical concept, but anything *religious* was anathema to him. As to his Bucket List, Nimrod at first felt he had done everything he wanted to do, but with further consideration, he later came back with these wishes:

- To see my new book and the second book I'm starting to work on be successful and maybe help somebody;
- To place my photo *oeuvre* somewhere in a museum, library or college.

Joanne's word could be "growth." As she wrote, "I was a plant that wanted to grow, but could do so only when properly nourished." The most fertile soil for her was her Episcopal parish and its supportive priest, but she worked hard on herself in this group as well. She was learning to forgive in the present, still working on forgiving the past, and was careful to stay "detached" from (but not blind to) painful memories. She summarized the meaning of her life this way:

Learning that individual selfhood is:

- A gift from God, to be honored;
- A gift that must be discovered if it was hidden from you; and
- A gift that will grow and strengthen your human connectedness IF you humbly seek, with God's guidance, the conditions to nurture it.

And her Bucket List:

I need to actively nourish my best self by practicing the following spiritual activities in a more regular way: Bible/inspirational reading; reading on adult-child issues; prayer and meditation; journal-keeping; expressing affirmation. Also, I will acknowledge the fruits of these activities, thanking my Higher Power, and making a concerted effort to apply my learning to the experience of everyday life.

Much of this process for the people in both workshops involved confirming what they already knew about themselves but had not organized in their minds, much less articulated. Some of it was new insight, resulting in the creation of a different path into the future. Each of them told some of their story and bore witness to the stories of others, and in that sacred process, was transformed to varying degrees. The following chapter will compare their initial

survey to their follow-up interview and attempt to draw some conclusions. (Their demographics are found in Appendix D.)

CHAPTER 8

THE PARTICIPANTS: BEFORE AND AFTER

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

—T.S. Eliot, “Little Gidding.”

Having discussed the process of the workshops, this chapter will look at the before-and-after of them: results from the Initial Survey filled out by participants after the initial presentation but before we began the workshop sessions, followed by responses from their follow-up interviews afterward.

KENDAL

Brendan: Initial Survey

Religion you were born into: Catholic.

Religion in which you were raised and educated: Catholic.

Life passages celebrated in which religion: Catholic.

Adult faith community, if any: Became Episcopalian after marriage.

Part of a faith community now? No.

Do you consider yourself a spiritual person? Why or why not?

I do pray. I do believe in Orthodox Christianity. Some meditation.

Is your spirituality connected to religion? Yes.

In what ways do you nurture your spiritual life?

Meditation, prayer, community, reading/study.

Do you feel you are on a spiritual journey? Yes.

Does your spirituality include a relationship with a “Higher Power”? If so, describe. God.

Name three people (alive or dead) who have influenced your spiritual life.

Fr. Fred Chase, Thomas Merton, Fr. Richard McBrien.

As you’ve aged, how has your capacity for spiritual experience grown? Stayed the same.

Your spiritual life is ...?

Comforting, strengthening, full of meaning, dependent on religion, sustaining.

To deepen your spiritual life, you would like to ...?

Seek more quiet time in my life; assist and support other people; find new opportunities to study and learn; find an Episcopal parish near Kendal.

Forgiveness of others is ...?

Necessary for me; something my faith demands of me; important.

Can you think of three things for which you have resisted forgiving yourself? Yes, alas.

If you were writing your autobiography, how important would your spiritual life be in the story?

Writing would reveal that.

What part of your present life are you most grateful for? The present.

In your obituary, beyond the facts of your life, what would you like to have written about you?

Worked with Episcopal parishes.

What do you hope will happen to you after you die? That God will receive me.

What question or comment would you add to this survey?

How can we support one another spiritually?

What would you especially like to discuss/investigate/learn about in this workshop?

The meaning of our lives.

Brendan: Final Interview

The workshop: “It was a lot in a short time.” He wished it were longer with the same intensity. but it was provocative to read, to listen, and to engage.

The group offered common ground. Everything was rich, much of it challenging.

What worked well: the physical closeness; knowing each other; in many ways, conversations continued; group knew what we were going to discuss; facilitator’s warmth helped group to relax; “It tapped into a very real need (at Kendal).”

“Diversity is highly praised, but we also learn from people who have gone the same route.”

Personally: He needs to learn and wants to encourage others to learn.
“I have this baggage that it is not appropriate to be proud—for *me* to be proud.”
“Isn’t it amazing how much baggage we carry?”
“How can you mature without wanting to know God?”
“If they love something, why would they not want to pursue it?”
“If people have doubts, why would they not pursue those doubts?”
“A thousand doubts do not make denial.” John Henry Cardinal Newman

Brenden: Brief Analysis

Brenden pointed out to all of us the importance of doing this work in community/communion. He articulated for himself how much still remained for him to explore, especially his relationship with God.

Cindy: Initial Survey

Religion you were born into: Judaism.

Religion in which you were raised and educated: Judaism: Raised, but not educated.

Adult faith community now, if any:

Unitarian Universalist Meeting House, 1996-2012, Chatham, MA.

Part of a faith community now? And if so, describe your involvement:

Absentee Unitarian.

If you were involved in a faith community, what kept you there?

Shared beliefs, satisfying worship, supportive community, clergy.

Do you consider yourself a spiritual person? Why or why not?

No. I don’t really know what the term “spiritual person” means. If it means the opposite of “materialistic,” then Yes!

Is your spirituality connected to religion?

Only in the sense that I’ve learned from Unitarianism and Buddhism.

In what ways do you nurture your spiritual life?

Meditation, closeness to nature, community, reading/study.

Can you identify spiritual experiences in your life? Describe one.

A sudden sense of transcendence, of being lifted out of/beyond one’s self.

Do you feel you are on a spiritual journey?

Not really, but a journey of discovery, perhaps toward “meaning.”

Does your spirituality include a relationship with a “Higher Power”? If so, describe.

Not exactly, but being part of a greater whole.

Name three people (alive or dead) who have influenced your spiritual life.

Rev. Ed Hardy (UU pastor); Victor Fraenkel, Dalai Lama.

As you've aged, how has your capacity for spiritual experience grown? It has grown stronger in the sense of greater patience, increased ability to identify with others in pain.

Your spiritual life is ...? Comforting ... to the extent that I have one.

To deepen your spiritual life, you would like to ...?

Seek more quiet time in my life; assist and support other people; read about other people's spiritual experiences; engage in dialogue with other faith/ethical traditions; find new opportunities to study and learn; spend time with nature.

Forgiveness of others is ...? Important

Can you think of three things for which you have resisted forgiving yourself? Yes.

If you were writing your autobiography, how important would your spiritual life be in the story?

As one part of the whole—spiritual seeking, rather than “life.”

What part of your present life are you most grateful for?

Children and grandchildren, and pretty good health and mobility.

In your obituary, beyond the facts of your life, what would you like to have written about you? That I was loving and, in a modest way, beloved.

What do you hope will happen to you after you die?

That somehow dying will be a homecoming to universal peace.

What would you especially like to discuss/investigate/learn about in this workshop?

How, at this late stage of my life, I can be connected and genuinely useful.

Cindy: Final Interview

An accident and her long recovery precluded the opportunity for an interview.

Cindy: Brief Analysis

Her participation in the workshop was one of her first involvements after moving to Kendal and her persistence, despite health problems, reflected her determination to make significant connections, learning about other people as they learned about her. This desire for peace and interconnectedness is also emblematic of the Unitarian Universalist tradition in which she feels so much at home.

Julie: Initial Survey

Religion you were born into: None

Religion in which you were raised and educated: Lutheran and Jewish.

Life passages celebrated in which religion: None.

Adult faith community, if any: During second marriage, Reform Jewish.

Part of a faith community now? And if so, describe your involvement: No.

If you are involved in a faith community, what keeps you there?
As I get older, I have become an atheist! (In the religious sense.)

Do you consider yourself a spiritual person? Why or why not?
Yes. I strongly believe in a Higher Power and that life is pre-destined.

Is your spirituality connected to religion? No.

In what ways do you nurture your spiritual life? Meditation, reading.

Does your spirituality include a relationship with a "Higher Power"? Yes.

Name three people (alive or dead) who have influenced your spiritual life.
Eric Hagen, Gail Konz.

As you've aged, how has your capacity for spiritual experience grown? Stayed the same.

Your spiritual life is ...? Comforting, isolating?, sustaining.

To deepen your spiritual life, you would like to ...?
Read about other people's spiritual experiences; be with others who share your beliefs.

Forgiveness of others is ...? Important.

Can you think of three things for which you have resisted forgiving yourself?
Yes. (Three were named but not included here.)

If you were writing your autobiography, how important would your spiritual life be in the story? I would never mention it.

What part of your present life are you most grateful for? That I am at Kendal.

In your obituary, beyond the facts of your life, what would you like to have written about you? Nothing.

What do you hope will happen to you after you die?
That I meet my husband and our daughter.

What question or comment would you add to this survey?
Are you doing this for a book or PhD?

What would you especially like to discuss/investigate/learn about in this workshop?
People who have extrasensory perception such as Nostradamus. Is that a God-given gift?

Julie: Final Interview

The workshop: The group was “too much—I’m a slow reader and very busy.”

Some issues were helpful.

She didn’t want to talk about personal things in the group.

She would have preferred a smaller group. She does not function well in groups; hearing is a problem and she does not like to speak up in groups. She much prefers one-to-one.

She would like to continue with me leading the group, but her preference is for a smaller group. She also felt she would do better if we met in residents’ apartments.

Personally: She does not “believe in scraping and bowing and rituals or pious words that one expresses at holidays.”

Julie: Brief Analysis

Although she missed three of the six sessions, she was determined to catch up and do the exercises. As she said, groups were difficult for her, but in the one-to-one of our final interview, the woman who had thought deeply about the work emerged. She knew what spirituality was; listening to great music was one of the ways she nourished her spirit, but religion of any sort was clearly not at all attractive to her.

Dorothy: Final Interview

(She did not complete any written materials during the workshop and, because of an accident, missed several sessions.)

The workshop: She did not feel she belonged in the group because of what she perceived as its “narrow theological perspective.” Nevertheless, she felt “very badly about her inability to do the group because of health reasons.”

How to improve group? “Perhaps start out with a humanist theme, then let people move into theistic (supernatural) discussion.”

Personally: She considers herself more humanistic than spiritual. Not atheist, but humanist.

She would like to have been an activist but most of her life she had struggled to find time.

She only began to have discretionary time in recent years.

She deeply regrets not getting a PhD. “There were so many opportunities and great things to study in anthropology.”

Dorothy: Brief Analysis

Her passion for justice issues—human issues—was not well articulated in the group, which may be why she felt she did not belong. To the rest of the group, however, she belonged. She is a woman of action on behalf of others more than one who indulges in self-reflection.

Marisa: Initial Survey:

Religion you were born into: French Huguenot.

Religion in which you were raised and educated: French Huguenot.

Life passages celebrated in which religion: French Huguenot Church.

Adult faith community, if any: United Church of Christ; Presbyterian; non-denominational (Riverside Church); Methodist.

Part of a faith community now? And if so, describe your involvement:

The Guild for Spiritual Guidance, now part of a “quad”—continuing sharing among four people who went through the training together.

If you are involved in a faith community, what keeps you there?

Shared beliefs, supportive community.

Do you consider yourself a spiritual person? Why or why not?

At times! I have an undercurrent of spiritual need, yet I often let minutia of life blot it out.

Is your spirituality connected to religion? Not really anymore, but I crave community.

In what ways do you nurture your spiritual life?

Meditation, prayer, closeness to nature, reading/study.

Can you identify spiritual experiences in your life? Describe one.

As an adolescent, camping, staring and worshipping under the stars.

Do you feel you are on a spiritual journey? Yes.

Does your spirituality include a relationship with a “Higher Power”? If so, describe.

God and Christ.

Name three people (alive or dead) who have influenced your spiritual life.

André Trocmé, my uncle, a committed and forceful pastor; more recently, Merton (and Nouwen); and definitely, Joan Chittister.

As you’ve aged, how has your capacity for spiritual experience grown? Stayed the same.

Your spiritual life is ...? Comforting, sustaining, needing support,

To deepen your spiritual life, you would like to ...? Seek more quiet time in my life; assist and support other people; find a new way to worship more relevant to my life; be with others who share my beliefs; spend time with nature.

Forgiveness of others is ...?

Sometimes difficult for me; something my faith demands of me; important.

Can you think of three things for which you have resisted forgiving yourself?

This is hard and I find myself going in circles about things I don't like about myself and am often unable to change (or even forgive myself).

If you were writing your autobiography, how important would your spiritual life be in the story? My church membership has not necessarily fed my spiritual life and my spiritual life has often been stagnant.

What part of your present life are you most grateful for?

A chance to reflect and a feeling of freedom to do so on my own.

In your obituary, beyond the facts of your life, what would you like to have written about you? To have connected and been enriched by thinkers and doers (inspired by Christ's teachings); my ability to give of myself (also inspired by Christ's teaching).

What do you hope will happen to you after you die? To reconnect with people I have loved and to go on in the Spirit—in total completeness.

Marisa: Final Interview

The workshop: "The group was definitely too short!" The material was quite relevant, but the readings were not entirely understood. She wished I had given better explanations of readings. What didn't work was that "people didn't do their homework." I could emphasize at the beginning that I needed stronger commitment, especially to do homework. "People are not used to doing that." The best part of the group was my input. Too many others talked about *doing*. How does one elicit feelings? Her concern was that people share their "real self." "The willingness to be vulnerable without being weepy is really hard to find at Kendal. The population is very smart." The group remained "too plastic."

Did treating spirituality apart from religion make sense? "Yes! Religion is man-made."

Personally: "I miss a church and the community of a church."

"Spiritual yearning is so prolific in our culture. How do we nourish our spirits?"

Marisa: Brief Analysis

For Marisa, the workshop was but one involvement in a quest for spiritual enrichment and community—ideally both together. The intense work to finish her memoirs precluded her doing the written work for the workshop, although she recognized the value of it. She came away wanting more.

Martin: Initial Survey

Religion you were born into: Episcopal.

Religion in which you were raised and educated:

Episcopal—youth choir, Christ Church, Cambridge, MA.

Life passages celebrated in which religion: Boy Scout Troop at Unitarian Church led to active participation; gave youth sermon at Parker's Church (Unitarian) in Boston.

Adult faith community, if any: After marriage to a French Huguenot, together we searched and found a new home in the Congregational Church (now United Church of Christ); active on boards and taught Sunday School. When living in NYC, joined Riverside Church. When in country, joined small local Methodist Church.

Part of a faith community now? And if so, describe your involvement:

Seventeen years National Training Laboratories; two years in Guild for Spiritual Guidance; currently in 18-month Contemplative Formation Training group.

Do you consider yourself a spiritual person? Why or why not?

Somewhat. More active in search for God within.

In what ways do you nurture your spiritual life?

Meditation, prayer, reading/study, participation in Contemplative Formation Training group, much influenced in recent years by works of Joan Chittister.

Does your spirituality include a relationship with a "Higher Power"? If so, describe.

Yes, God.

Name three people (alive or dead) who have influenced your spiritual life.

Rev. Roberta Klauder, Joan Chittister, Rev. Ralph Darmstadt, Renata Craine Sutherland, English and German mystics.

As you've aged, how has your capacity for spiritual experience grown? Stronger.

Your spiritual life is ...? Needing support, is nourished by participation in small groups.

To deepen your spiritual life, you would like to ...?

Seek more quiet time in my life; find new opportunities to study and learn.

Forgiveness of others is ...?

Important. Something I want to do more spontaneously and generously.

Can you think of three things for which you have resisted forgiving yourself?

Yes. (Listed three things not included here.)

If you were writing your autobiography, how important would your spiritual life be in the story? Somewhat—I kept searching.

What part of your present life are you most grateful for?

Marriage of 57 years and participation in wife's family.

In your obituary, beyond the facts of your life, what would you like to have written about you? A person who kept searching and cared.

What do you hope will happen to you after you die? Ashes spread in Hudson on shore; memory—a positive one—in lives of descendants and friends.

What question or comment would you add to this survey?

Attitude to and influence of this environment at Kendal. We are filled with secular Jews—dominated by them. Quaker spirit is espoused, but not practiced. Sensibility is severely secular. I miss not having a Bible study group. No facing up to entrapment. We have “signed up” for the rest of our lives.

Martin: Final Interview

The workshop: The timing of the group worked for him, but only later did he catch up with reading and writing. Then he was inspired and ready to work. He looked forward to getting together and doing the work together.

What could be better? Push more to get people to read the material and review handouts. All the readings and surveys were very appropriate and helpful.

From Joan Chittister: As you get older, you have a chance—last chance—to focus on what will be your spiritual life.

Personally: He was resistant to the end-of-life work, but realized it was a way to communicate the meaning of their lives.

“I’ve learned things about myself that I was absolutely not in touch with before, through our work together. Forgiveness is not new, but being in touch with (the impact of) workplace failure is.”

His choice of the eagle as his bird is both good and bad. The eagle is admired—and alone.

Socially: He is put off by the enormous secularism that exists at Kendal. He has had (and prefers) lots of group experience. Many people are happy here, but he thinks they do not recognize the “entrapment.” He came to Kendal with ideas and experience to be used in the residence, but was rebuffed. He may try again now, after five years. He has come to see Kendal as an apartment house with a restaurant.

Martin: Brief Analysis:

Martin is definitely on a spiritual quest, but he’s unsure of what he seeks. He can articulate what disappoints him and what blesses him, and his training, religious experience and practice of meditation bespeak a mature spirituality. And yet, he quests.

Sigrid: Initial Survey

Religion you were born into: Congregational Church.

Religion in which you were raised and educated: Augustana Lutheran Church

Life passages celebrated in which religion: Baptized, confirmed, some Sunday School in the Congregational Church; changed to mother’s church (Lutheran) at age 9 or 10.

Adult faith community, if any: Sage Chapel Choir, Cornell University; Scarsdale Congregational Church (U.C.C.); “Women Unlimited,” an environmental group of women based at Scarsdale Church, met for twelve years.

Part of a faith community now? And if so, describe your involvement:

Yes, still at Scarsdale Church. Also a participant in Kendal's Faith Seeking Group.

If you are involved in a faith community, what keeps you there?

Shared beliefs, satisfying worship, supportive community, clergy, music.

Is your spirituality connected to religion? Less and less as time goes by.

Yes, but my definition is less God-centered than it used to be.

In what ways do you nurture your spiritual life?

Closeness to nature, community, reading/study, music.

Can you identify a spiritual experiences in your life? Describe one.

Singing the "St Matthew Passion"; an aurora borealis in 1950.

Do you feel you are on a spiritual journey? Yes.

Does your spirituality include a relationship with a "Higher Power"? If so, describe.

Yes. Can't describe.

Name three people (alive or dead) who have influenced your spiritual life.

Rev. Avery Post, author Elizabeth Johnson, Rev. Beatrice Blair.

As you've aged, how has your capacity for spiritual experience grown?

Stronger and different.

Your spiritual life is ...?

Comforting, strengthening, full of meaning, sustaining, adventurous.

To deepen your spiritual life, you would like to ...?

Engage in dialogue with other faith/ethical traditions; find new opportunities to study and learn; be with others who share my beliefs.

Forgiveness of others is ...?

Necessary for me; something I do regularly; something my faith demands of me.

Can you think of three things for which you have resisted forgiving yourself? Yes.

If you were writing your autobiography, how important would your spiritual life be in the story? Medium important.

What part of your present life are you most grateful for?

My sense of security in an atmosphere of fellowship.

In your obituary, beyond the facts of your life, what would you like to have written about you? A survivor of the early death of my spouse (at age 37); sense of humor; fighter for

women's rights; leadership roles in Scarsdale Congregational Church and in Library Associations.

What do you hope will happen to you after you die?

My children will tell humorous stories of our lives together.

What would you especially like to discuss/investigate/learn about in this workshop?

Wisdom-making: What does it take?; the meaning of our lives; how to listen and elicit stories.

Sigrid: Final Interview

The workshop: "The group was too short a time for all these big issues. Maybe do a Part A and B, or expand it to eight weeks. Have no more than eight people."

She wanted to hear more stories. Others in the group were not forthcoming.

"We're a tough group; there was a willingness to *look* back but unwilling to *go* back and see where we should have done things differently. Forgiveness and guilt—the yeasts of our life—helped to make us who we are."

"The ethical will was too much of a head trip. You're having to acknowledge that you're important after you die."

Personally: "It's important to create a new society. We need to understand how to do that." God? She resents the male figure.

Sigrid: Brief Analysis

An eloquent speaker, storyteller, and writer, Sigrid easily accessed what the workshop asked of her, but she wanted more time to go deeper. Wisdom-making is well along for her, but she wants more, and she wants it in the company of others equally willing to delve more deeply into their spiritual selves.

Stewart: Initial Interview

Religion you were born into: Episcopal.

Religion in which you were raised and educated: Church of Scotland.

Life passages celebrated in which religion: Married in Lutheran parish church, Helsinki.

Adult faith community, if any: Quaker Middle School, England; acolyte in Episcopal Chapel; school in Dorset, England; Friends Meeting of Chappaqua.

Part of a faith community now? And if so, describe your involvement:

Friends Meeting of Chappaqua.

If you are involved in a faith community, what keeps you there? Shared beliefs, satisfying worship, supportive community, obligation.

Do you consider yourself a spiritual person? Why or why not? Yes, family heritage.

In what ways do you nurture your spiritual life? Meditation, prayer, travel/pilgrimage; worship, observing a Sabbath, community, reading/study.

Can you identify spiritual experiences in your life? Describe one.
Yes, too long ago to describe.

Do you feel you are on a spiritual journey? Yes.

Does your spirituality include a relationship with a "Higher Power"? If so, describe. Yes.

Name three people (alive or dead) who have influenced your spiritual life.
(Could not decipher.)

As you've aged, how has your capacity for spiritual experience grown? Stayed the same.

Your spiritual life is ...? Dependent on religion.

To deepen your spiritual life, you would like to ...? Assist and support other people; read about other people's spiritual experiences; engage in dialogue with other faith/ethical traditions; find new opportunities to study and learn now that I am deaf; how to face death.

Forgiveness of others is ...? Important, necessary for me.

Can you think of three things for which you have resisted forgiving yourself? Yes.

If you were writing your autobiography, how important would your spiritual life be in the story? I did.

What part of your present life are you most grateful for?
Marriage, children, grandchildren, students.

In your obituary, beyond the facts of your life, what would you like to have written about you? Helped (others) know who we are.

What do you hope will happen to you after you die? Acceptance of not knowing.

What would you especially like to discuss/investigate/learn about in this workshop?
Forgiveness of ourselves and others; the meaning of our lives.

Stewart: Final Interview

The workshop: He stayed in the group because of Sigrid, Brandan, Marisa and Martin.
The discussion of spirituality was too vague.
It was an honest group, but a few people talked too much.
Meeting around a small table was good.
The timing of the group was just about right.

Forgiveness was the most traumatic thing for him.

At the final interview in his apartment, he had laid out objects for me to see that represented his family's and his own accomplishments. He is very proud of and knowledgeable about his history.

Stewart: Brief Analysis

A brilliant man and a scholar, he had in some ways already ventured beyond the scope of what we did together, but his focus was more on theology than personal spirituality. Most telling were the objects he set out for me to see at our final interview, and his deep pride in his ancestors' achievements and his own. It was Holy Ground to see, hear about, and touch these highly symbolic mementos.

Terri: Initial Survey

Religion you were born into: Roman Catholic.

Religion in which you were raised and educated: Same.

Life passages celebrated in which religion: Catholic

Adult faith community, if any:

For the past ten years, I have been a lay associate of a religious community.

For the past forty years, I have celebrated many Jewish holidays.

Part of a faith community now? And if so, describe your involvement:

Yes, any Catholic services provided at Kendal and systematic involvement as an associate with the religious community.

If you are involved in a faith community, what keeps you there?

Shared beliefs, supportive community, educational opportunities. With the Catholic Church in such turmoil, the religious order is more forward thinking and accepting of the real world.

Do you consider yourself a spiritual person? Why or why not? I do, and I try to share myself with others in a way that feeds my soul and gives others a volt of joy.

Is your spirituality connected to religion? Yes.

In what ways do you nurture your spiritual life? Meditation, prayer, travel/pilgrimage, closeness to nature, worship, community, reading/study.

Can you identify spiritual experiences in your life? Describe one.

Yes. Usually it has to do with nature. Only once did I witness the opening of a pond full of water lilies opening one by one as the sun hit the pond and popping as they opened.

Do you feel you are on a spiritual journey? Yes.

Does your spirituality include a relationship with a “Higher Power”? If so, describe. Yes. I only know that on occasions ... I am transported to a special place.

Name three people (alive or dead) who have influenced your spiritual life.

My mother, my sister and brother, several friends, Joan Chittister.

As you’ve aged, how has your capacity for spiritual experience grown? It’s stronger.

Your spiritual life is ...?

Strengthening, full of meaning, satisfying, confusing, vital and vigorous.

To deepen your spiritual life, you would like to ...? Seek more quiet time in my life; assist and support other people; find a new way to worship more relevant to my life; engage in dialogue with other faith/ethical traditions; spend more time with nature.

Forgiveness of others is ...? Necessary for me; something I do regularly; something my faith demands of me; important.

Can you think of three things for which you have resisted forgiving yourself? No. It has taken a long time but I have learned to be comfortable with myself most of the time.

If you were writing your autobiography, how important would your spiritual life be in the story? It would be woven throughout.

What part of your present life are you most grateful for?

Being surrounded by caring people.

In your obituary, beyond the facts of your life, what would you like to have written about you? She cared for others and took strength from the involvement.

What do you hope will happen to you after you die?

I hope there is an afterlife. It seems to me that it would be a shame to not develop more fully in some way what I’ve learned on earth.

What question or comment would you add to this survey?

How much have your beliefs developed/changed over the many years and have these changes deepened your spirituality?

What would you especially like to discuss/investigate/learn about in this workshop?

I would be very pleased if we covered all the topics above. (See Initial Survey, Appendix C.) After that I might be curious about something which developed out of our discussions.

Terri: Final Interview

The workshop: “This group started a new social level!” (People now talking, eating together.)

Did it work? “Oh yes! It gave me targets. I’ve been planning my funeral for three years but had not written it down. Now it will be in writing for the sisters.”

Was the group too much in too short a time? Yes, but she was so intrigued that she put aside the time. Also because she reads so slowly (poor eyesight), it was a struggle to keep up. The ethical will didn't work for her. She's been talking to (someone who tried to explain it to her) for years, but could never wrap her mind around it.

"Do not extend the workshop beyond six weeks. Require discipline for anyone doing this workshop."

Was it spiritual enough? "Yes. It was the right decision to keep it spiritual and not religious and allow everyone to bring their own beliefs."

Personally: About God? She no longer knows.

Socially: "Forty percent of Kendal is Jewish, mostly secular Jews. There is an underlying problem of anti-Semitism. We are required every year to fill out a satisfaction survey. For about the third year, results revealed severe anti-Semitic comments."

Terri: Brief Analysis

Terri expressed deep satisfaction with her present life at Kendal, despite the anti-Semitism that she was not alone in noting. She had already worked on some of what the workshop involved, especially the difficult issue of forgiveness, but welcomed the occasion to go deeper in the company of others. She was delighted with the community that grew out of the workshop.

MORNINGSIDE GARDENS

Harriet: Initial Survey

Religion you were born into: Catholic

Religion in which you were raised and educated: Catholic

Life passages celebrated in which religion: Catholic

Adult faith community, if any: None

Part of a faith community now? And if so, describe your involvement:
Catholic; attend church on a regular basis.

If you are involved in a faith community, what keeps you there?
Shared beliefs, satisfying worship, supportive community.

Do you consider yourself a spiritual person? Why or why not?
Yes, the feelings I have for people places, and protection I have from harm.

Is your spirituality connected to religion? Yes.

In what ways do you nurture your spiritual life?
Meditation, prayer, closeness to nature, worship.

Do you feel you are on a spiritual journey? Yes.

Does your spirituality include a relationship with a “Higher Power” Yes.

Name three people (alive or dead) who have influenced your spiritual life.
Mother, sisters.

As you’ve aged, how has your capacity for spiritual experience grown? Stronger.

Your spiritual life is ...? Comforting, strengthening.

To deepen your spiritual life, you would like to ...? Read about other people’s spiritual experiences; engage in dialogue with other faith/ethical traditions.

Forgiveness of others is ...? Important; something I’d rather not discuss.

If you were writing your autobiography, how important would your spiritual life be in the story? Yes.

What part of your present life are you most grateful for?
Being able to take care of myself.

In your obituary, beyond the facts of your life, what would you like to have written about you? That I was a decent person.

What do you hope will happen to you after you die?
That I will be happy with the people I loved.

What would you especially like to discuss/investigate/learn about in this workshop?
Understanding and accepting other beliefs and practices.

Harriet: Final Interview

The workshop: The group worked, especially the diversity. She enjoyed hearing other stories.

Too much in too short a time? “No. It’s up to each person to pace herself.” She didn’t do the written work one week and in the forgiveness analysis, there was nothing to dig up.

Personally: “If you’ve been taught right from wrong, then sin is going against your conscience.” She was taught that you don’t fight people about their religion.

“You’re right to do things according to your conscience. God will judge you accordingly. I don’t believe the Church can come in and tell us what to do.” As for the Pope vs. the nuns: “He’s got a fight on his hands!” She disagrees with a lot of (Catholic) teaching. “The Church has no right to decide abortion; it’s a terribly hard decision as it is for women.”

Meaning of her life? She’s done the best she could with what she’s had. She never tried to hurt anyone. “Some people find fault with anything.”

Harriet: Brief Analysis

Secure in her faith, raised with love, confident that she has made decisions thoughtfully and morally, Harriet is able now to relax, reflect, and share her deep wisdom. She taught us gently and well, without any effort to do so on her part.

Joanne: Initial Survey

Religion in which you were raised and educated: Methodist.

Life passages celebrated in which religion: Methodist.

Part of a faith community now? And if so, describe your involvement:

Episcopal. Weekly attendance at Mass. There I try to strengthen my relationship with God by expressing gratitude and by growing in my understanding of Christian teachings and ways to apply them to my life.

If you are involved in a faith community, what keeps you there?

Shared beliefs, satisfying worship, supportive community, clergy. Also: warm environment; simple, direct, inspirational sermons that connect with the congregation to prompt change and growth; the beauty of the liturgy and the response of the congregation. I am very drawn to pray there.

Do you consider yourself a spiritual person? Why or why not?

I am a spiritual person to the extent that I sense the existence of a power outside of and far greater than myself, and I seek a relationship with it. Cultivating this relationship has helped me feel more connected with the human race... I believe that we derive our ethical and civilizing impulses from this high power, and that eternal qualities such as truth, goodness and beauty have their origin there as well. I attempt to communicate with this power through expressions of gratitude, requests for intercession, and appeals for strength and guidance. I have prayed anytime, anywhere, but find that prayer outdoors and in church is the most powerful, as it seems to grow and develop spontaneously.

Is your spirituality connected to religion? Yes.

In what ways do you nurture your spiritual life?

Prayer, closeness to nature, worship, reading/study.

Can you identify spiritual experiences in your life? Describe one. Yes.

My most profound spiritual experiences were 1) learning to pray, and 2) having my prayers for strength and guidance answered (I believe) during a time of intense self-examination. Also, remembering deceased family and friends by visiting places that had meaning for them.

Do you feel you are on a spiritual journey? Yes.

Does your spirituality include a relationship with a "Higher Power"? If so, describe. Yes.
God.

Name three people (alive or dead) who have influenced your spiritual life.

In addition to three clergymen (Methodist, Episcopal and Catholic), she includes a list of authors and particular books: Michael Lloyd, Dostoevsky, Chaim Potok, Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend, Susan Jeffers, Carl R. Rogers, Joan Borysenko, Lloyd Edwards, Steven Former, Dr. Charles L. Whitfield.

As you've aged, how has your capacity for spiritual experience grown? Stronger.

Your spiritual life is ...?

Comforting, strengthening, full of meaning, somewhat dependent on religion, satisfying (only if it keeps growing), sustaining.

To deepen your spiritual life, you would like to ...?

Assist and support other people, read about other people's spiritual experiences, be with others who share my beliefs, spend time with nature.

Forgiveness of others is ...?

Difficult for me, necessary for me, something I do regularly, important.

Can you think of three things for which you have resisted forgiving yourself? Yes.

If you were writing your autobiography, how important would your spiritual life be in the story? My most important achievement: developing and maintaining a spiritual life, because it is the foundation for the way you live.

What part of your present life are you most grateful for? I am most grateful that I have been able to grow in compassion. This growth has especially helped me in dealing with difficult family members.

In your obituary, beyond the facts of your life, what would you like to have written about you? Caring daughter, sister, aunt, and friend; keen appreciator of beauty, who never lost her sense of wonder; lifelong learner; advocate of spiritual growth as a path to self-acceptance and harmonious living who believed "it is never too late to have a happy childhood."

What do you hope will happen to you after you die?

I hope the good qualities of my spirit survive. They will no longer be embodied by me, but they will live on in the memory of others and will be embodied by future generations in their own unique ways. The Book of Revelation tells of a new world order without pain, suffering or death, but such perfection is impossible for me to imagine. I feel a strong obligation to contribute to the Christian vision of peace and harmony now, in *this* life, to move it along in my own little way.

What would you especially like to discuss/investigate/learn about in this workshop?

I don't have a particular topic I would like to discuss, but I very much look forward to hearing the other participants express their thoughts and feelings on spirituality. Thank you for your extremely thoughtful questionnaire.

Joanne: Final Comment

Joanne declined a final interview, but commented at the last session that the workshop was “too intense. I had to put my life on hold.”

Joanne: Brief Analysis

Personal growth was Joanne’s mission, and during the workshop, she indicated verbally and in writing a good understanding of what that required of her. However, her abrupt exit after the last session and refusal to communicate with group members puzzled all of us. There was a disconnect we had all missed.

Nimrod: Initial Survey

Religion you were born into: Congregationalist.

Religion in which you were raised and educated: Varied; none.

Life passages celebrated in which religion:

Baptism: Congregational; Confirmation: Methodist.

Adult faith community, if any: Educated in a college founded by Quakers.

Part of a faith community now? **NO**

Do you consider yourself a spiritual person? Why or why not? I am a socialist atheist.

However, during and after an abortive Freudian depth psychoanalysis, I had many strange experiences which I am now trying to understand.

Is your spirituality connected to religion? No; who knows? Buddhism?

In what ways do you nurture your spiritual life?

Closeness to nature, community, reading/study, working with my hands. Also, brothel sex, nude body-painting, sky diving, art photography (nude college women), classical music (37 year subscriber to New York Philharmonic).

Can you identify spiritual experiences in your life? Describe one.

Yes. Maya, as I understand it. (from Schopenhauer’s *The Veil of Maya*).

Do you feel you are on a spiritual journey? I hope not.

Does your spirituality include a relationship with a “Higher Power”? I hope not.

Name three people (alive or dead) who have influenced your spiritual life.

Heidegger, Gertrude Wimmer, Dr. Albert Ellis.

As you’ve aged, how has your capacity for spiritual experience grown? Stayed the same.

Your spiritual life is ...? Confusing, frightening.

To deepen your spiritual life, you would like to ...?

Engage in dialogue with other faith/ethical traditions; find new opportunities to study and learn; be with others who share my beliefs.

Forgiveness of others is ...? Important.

Can you think of three things for which you have resisted forgiving yourself? Yes.

If you were writing your autobiography, how important would your spiritual life be in the story? I demand an explanation of these strange experiences.

What part of your present life are you most grateful for? Peace and quiet; art.

In your obituary, beyond the facts of your life, what would you like to have written about you? That I tried to help my friends; that I showed courage in facing great difficulties.

What do you hope will happen to you after you die? I will find three doors labeled Eternal Life, Reincarnation, Oblivion. I hope I choose Oblivion.

What question or comment would you add to this survey?

What you, Carole, call spirituality, I call the province of psychology; my (definition of) "spirituality" is transcendental, "supernatural."

What would you especially like to discuss/investigate/learn about in this workshop?

The Ground of Being??

Nimrod: Final Interview

The workshop: "The group was good. Time well spent. It clarified my thoughts. It was a little intense, but I'm used to pressure." The last session was the hardest for him because of the abrupt departure of one participant.

"It helped me sort out spirituality—beautiful, but occult, a bit superstitious."

"It was difficult to read. I'm part blind in one eye since birth."

Personally: "As to God: There might be something, but I deny it. Maybe only negative entropy." "I'm a nihilist." George Bernard Shaw: The devil makes the place livelier.

"I'm not consistent and I'm rather glad I'm not." "I want to aspire to achievement; don't want to 'cultivate my garden.' I don't want to settle for small things."

Nimrod: Brief Analysis

Nimrod delights in being unique and in being as generous to others as his life allows. His answers indicate ambivalence about spirituality, although he adamantly refuses to apply the concept to himself. He endorses concepts like connectedness and awareness of being part of something greater, but he will not consider them spiritual.

Simone: Initial Survey

Religion you were born into: Protestant, Church of England.

Religion in which you were raised and educated: Protestant.

Life passages celebrated in which religion: Baptism, married in Church (second time).

Adult faith community, if any:

Mother was very against religion. I was agnostic despite attending Church and religious instruction in school. Freud seemed to have the best description of being human.

Part of a faith community now? And if so, describe your involvement:

Yes, joined the Riverside Church in 1967; very active in adult education, Poetry Group, Compassionate Ministries.

If you are involved in a faith community, what keeps you there?

Supportive community, educational opportunities.

Do you consider yourself a spiritual person? Why or why not? “Spiritual” seems difficult for me to accept. “Courage to be” seems more appropriate for me.

Is your spirituality connected to religion? Yes.

In what ways do you nurture your spiritual life?

Observing a Sabbath, community, reading/study, working with my hands.

Can you identify spiritual experiences in your life? Describe one. Not sure.

In 1961, in Belize, found myself in an extremely difficult situation. In desperation, “If there is a God—show me!!” Experienced amazing peace for 30 minutes.

Do you feel you are on a spiritual journey?

Something has grown and continues—be it insight.

Does your spirituality include a relationship with a “Higher Power”? If so, describe.

I hope so—sometimes it does. Rely on Tillich, God is “Ground of Being,” our ultimate concern.

Name three people (alive or dead) who have influenced your spiritual life.

Professor Philip Phenix (Philosophy and Religion), Rev. Johnny Bush, Paul Tillich, Martin Buber, etc. etc.

As you’ve aged, how has your capacity for spiritual experience grown?

Just feel more centered.

Your spiritual life is ...? Full of meaning, isolating, satisfying, sustaining.

To deepen your spiritual life, you would like to ...?

Read about other people's spiritual experiences; engage in dialogue with other faith/ethical traditions; be with others who share my beliefs; go on pilgrimage.

Forgiveness of others is ...? Something I do regularly. Used to blame my mother but quite understand why she was bi-polar and very difficult. My father was present physically but absent in relation.

Can you think of three things for which you have resisted forgiving yourself?
Find myself apologizing and feeling a bit of an idiot, but not aware of needing to forgive myself.

What part of your present life are you most grateful for?
Health, courage, capacity to relate to others.

In your obituary, beyond the facts of your life, what would you like to have written about you? "Age could not wither, nor custom stale her infinite variety." (from Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*).

What do you hope will happen to you after you die?
That my journey will have some impact in eternity—maybe memory and thought—Teilhard de Chardin wrote something to that effect.

What question or comment would you add to this survey?
Read Jung and feel there is a polarity in all of us—masculine vs. feminine. I think there is suppression of the feminine in all cultures. Wisdom seems to reside there—perhaps some kind of war between these poles.

What would you especially like to discuss/investigate/learn about in this workshop?
Perhaps some conception of God with the help of listening to others.

Simone: Final Interview

(This interview was short, after a meal together, but Simone had been thoughtful and articulate throughout the workshop and didn't have much to add here.

The workshop: Was the group too much (timing, subject and intensity)? "No! A group that sits in a circle and interacts is more likely to build trust."

Simone: Brief Analysis

Simone has actively and courageously sought the best life possible for herself and her son, and will likely continue to do so as long as she lives. She has a wealth of knowledge and a questioning mind, an ability to laugh at herself while knowing what to take seriously. She sees the world, other people and herself clearly, and her insights enriched this group and each of us personally.

CHAPTER 9 EVALUATION AND REPLICATION

The compensation of growing old, Peter Walsh thought, coming out of Regent's Park, and holding his hat in his hand, was simply this: that the passions remain as strong as ever, but one has gained—at last!—the power which adds the supreme flavor to existence,—the power of taking hold of experience, of turning it around, slowly, in the light.

Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

An experience—any experience—is truly complete only when one has looked back on it, and turned it around in the light to view its shape and its place in the scheme of things. Then, ideally, one attaches to it some words that define the experience and incorporate it into a larger story. Even the priests who wrote the first chapter of Genesis understood that process. Not one of the six days of creation was complete until God had reviewed it and pronounced it “Good.”

In Clinical Pastoral Education, the model is called action–reflection. Knowing the barest minimum necessary, an often-terrified student enters the pastoral fray, does the job, and only then talks and writes about it. For instance, a new CPE student is thrown into the Emergency Room on her first day, and only after she has ministered to two families whose patriarchs were pronounced dead-on-arrival from unforeseen massive myocardial infarctions is she pulled out and asked how her day has gone.¹⁰⁴

Heuristic research works in a similar way, in that the researcher does not necessarily know what questions to ask until participants in the study have been engaged as co-researchers and together they explore what needs to be questioned and answered. The questions are at least as important as the answers.

¹⁰⁴ That was this writer's experience on her first day of CPE at Hartford Hospital, September, 1986.

This chapter is a critique of that heuristic, action–reflection process with this project, followed by ideas about how to use the knowledge gained in the future. The first section will answer the questions posed in my Proposal (see Appendix A); the second section will present issues that arose and had not been mentioned in the Proposal; finally, the last section will offer suggestions for how this project could best be replicated.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS FROM PROPOSAL, CHAPTER 5:

How much did the elders involved understand about their spiritual needs and potential before my presentation?

All the information they needed about their spirituality was contained within them when we began. They knew what they missed, what they yearned for, what brought them peace, and whether or not they related to a Divine Being. What we did in the workshop was—together—help each person focus on what they carried in their hearts and minds, pull out what was most important and articulate what they could do with it. We began by exploring the nature of spirituality, which provoked each of them to decide, at least for purposes of the workshop, what being a spiritual person meant. Then, through the progression of topics that sent them back into their past and forward into their future, they gradually understood the way their experience had fed or damaged their spiritual lives.

In short, I believe they came with knowledge of their history and spiritual experience, but knowledge is not wisdom until it is organized and meaning is drawn out of it. I worked with thirteen people who could already be deemed “wise” in many ways, but the process we engaged together helped them to recognize that wisdom in themselves and think more clearly about what they wanted from the future. A member of the Kendal group told me to be sure to

note that *all* of them were on a spiritual “search,” a journey that was open-ended. I’m not sure they would have been able to articulate that before the workshop began.

Perhaps most useful was that within the workshop group, each person had *permission* to grieve or celebrate their experiences. The stories told were received with respect and admiration. Each story was witnessed, each person affirmed. More than once, on hearing stories humbly or proudly or tentatively presented, I thought of Luther’s words to the Diet of Worms in 1521, when questioned about what he stood for: “On this I take my stand. I can do no other.” And some would have added Luther’s final word, “God help me.”

Was the initial presentation helpful to them, somewhat interesting, or simply boring?

At Kendal, many of the 60 or so people who came to the presentation came because they attended every Monday evening lecture. Some of them were bored and dozed off. Those interested in the subject stayed awake, asked questions, or made comments at the end, and some of those people indicated an interest in participating in the workshop. Not everyone who joined the group had attended the initial presentation, but they had at least heard about it from others who did. The presentation opened the possibility of exploring one’s spirituality through examining their lives rather than their religious experience. I later learned that much of the Kendal population were secular Jews, in addition to a considerable number of unchurched Christians. I suspect that for some of them, the idea of spirituality apart from religion was intriguing. Others had lost interest in the subject long ago.

At Morningside Gardens, the initial presentation was to a circle of ten people in a small room. Although the words spoken were the same, the MG presentation was more conversational than the formal presentation given from behind a podium with a microphone at Kendal. At MG, everyone was engaged and interested. One woman said quite frankly that

if the group I proposed would not tell her exactly what happened after death—she was anxiously preoccupied with that subject—then it was of no use to her. But even she engaged in the lively discussion that followed the presentation.

In both venues, the presentation opened a conversation that had not occurred in those places before and for that reason alone, it was successful. It also offered the idea that life now was more than just remembering the past and preparing for death. It was a stage of its own, meant to be productive, particularly in a spiritual sense.

For those who participated in the workshops, were they able to deepen their spiritual lives in ways that were acceptable and enriching to them?

At no point was anyone in either group asked to do anything unacceptable to him or her. In some cases, participants saw a new way forward, but more commonly, they *recognized* what was already working or not working for them. I believe no one came away unchanged, and that had at least as much to do with being part of the community that formed within each group as with the subject matter. One of the people I interviewed before writing my Proposal was Samuel E. Deibler, Director of the Commission on Aging in Greenwich, CT. Sam said that most of his efforts were centered on getting elderly townspeople to come to their Senior Center to engage with others. “We are not meant to grow in isolation,” he said, and that statement has echoed throughout this process as one person after another affirmed the importance of community and connection with others.

So the answer to this question is “yes” in that participants recognized what enriched their spiritual nature, and having named it, they were free to nurture it—or not.

Did the mechanics of the workshop design operate well?

- *Space:* Neither of the spaces we began with worked well. At MG, the solution was provided by a member of the group who welcomed us to his studio and invited others to open their apartments to the group. At Kendal, we moved to a space that, only later, did participants indicate was less than perfect. This was a critical piece not well planned before the workshop began. On the positive side, the need to find a better place to meet provided the first instance of the groups' choosing themselves to change what I offered.
- *Size of the group:* I was afraid the MG group was too small, but it worked well and the intimacy gained by five people sitting around a card table was conducive to discussion and trust. The Kendal group was almost too large. If everyone had attended all the sessions and completed all the homework, we would have been seriously short of time. Plus, we pulled two dining tables together to fit the group, and often people with hearing problems were too far from speakers to be able to follow conversation.
- *Timeframe:* Two-hour sessions were perfect. Any longer and people would have been late for something else at Kendal, weary of sitting, or simply talked out. As for the length of the workshop, six sessions left some people feeling like we had barely begun when it was time to end, but no one said it was too long. Seven sessions might be better, with the first session more of a pre-workshop to introduce ourselves, examine the plan and the commitment asked of them, and only then, to sign on.
- *Reading Materials:* Most of what I gave the groups to read was bits and pieces that related to something that arose in discussion. This part of the workshop was not well planned by me. They should have had a small packet of reading material at the

beginning, and materials should have been printed or copied in *large* type (at least 14 point).

- *Surveys*: The Brief Questionnaire should have been distributed to the audience at Kendal before the presentation began, but was not, on the advice of the organizers. As a result, when the presentation ended, tired or disinterested people left immediately. I received only thirty completed questionnaires from an audience of sixty.

The other surveys worked well, eliciting enough information from participants to make for engaging, in-depth discussions.

What follow-up do the participants need, if any, to continue their spiritual growth?

They need involvement in a community—be it a congregation, the workshop group, or some other trustworthy gathering—in which they can continue to learn about faith issues and practice whatever feeds them spiritually, and that becomes a forum for continuing chapters of their stories.

The Kendal group decided quickly that they wanted to continue discussions and asked me if I would stay with them. We decided that we would meet monthly at the same time, moving to members' apartments, and we have done so, beginning as soon as the interviews ended to the present. Our conversations have been rich, built upon topics we covered in the workshop, but with a deeper level of trust and more willingness to be open and vulnerable. I do not foresee these gatherings ending any time soon.

Three of the four members of the MG group continue to gather for an occasional meal, and Nimrod keeps us all alert to events in his life (publication of his autobiography, a book-signing, gatherings at his studio). The respect and affection that grew among us

remains solid, but we do not gather in any formal way. Two of the three are content with their present church involvement and Nimrod with his creative endeavors.

What else is needed, if anything, to support these elders in facilitating similar groups?

While my original idea was to create a workshop that could be replicated by anyone, I realized that it needs a facilitator skilled in group dynamics and who would be focused on helping *others* toward self-discovery without engaging that process personally within the group.

ADDITIONAL EVALUATIONS:

- *Evaluation of the Facilitator:* I did not request an evaluation of myself as primary researcher and facilitator, and that was a *major* omission. It would not have served the purpose for me to request verbal evaluations, nor to solicit written evaluations from the participants. (Their handwritings are distinctive, and even their writing styles, should they use a computer, would identify them immediately.) But information is lacking about how well I facilitated the groups, how prepared I was for each topic, how well I prepared them for each exercise, how thoroughly I engaged each person, and how well the design of the workshop served the purpose. What I could have done was to utilize my Site Team to request this evaluation by phone, using standardized questions and inviting additional comments that might have provided useful information for me in future projects. The only comments I did receive were from the Kendal group. They wished I had been more firm in demanding commitment to all sessions and all homework. That critique, by the way, came from several people who did *not* meet that commitment.

- *Facilitator Self-Evaluation:*
 - I recognized immediately, even before participants mentioned it, that the spaces chosen for first meetings were inhospitable, and I regretted settling for what was offered. The solution to having better meeting spaces, especially at Kendal, would have been to request space sooner. This aspect of the workshop should have been taken much more seriously.
 - I struggled to stay organized, running two groups forty miles apart while working my regular hours at the hospital. I was prepared for every session and I don't think the participants perceived me as disorganized, but I know that I did not take the time to fully reflect on the written responses given to me each week. Had I done that, I could have offered more relevant segues from one session to another.
 - I believe I facilitated the groups well, but that was not a new experience for me. I made sure each person who had something to say had an opportunity to do so, and *was heard* even by those with poor hearing. I maintained the practice of allowing one speaker at a time. I believe, and this was confirmed in some of the follow-up interviews, that I brought a warmth and trustworthiness that helped to establish a sense of intimacy and safety in each group. In the process, I also realized that a group of this sort really *requires* a trained facilitator who can engage and empathize with group members while still maintaining appropriately objective oversight.
 - I should have insisted on a firmer commitment from the members of the Kendal group, although that would likely have reduced the number of participants. I did allow for one absence (out of six sessions) before we began, but there were people

who missed half the sessions and didn't think to tell me beforehand. Ultimately, we became a solid group, and the post-workshop meetings attest to that, but those people who *gave* less necessarily *received* less from the project. It is a lesson that residents of Kendal continue to learn for themselves as they shuttle from one attractive activity to another. But if I did another group there, I would demand my share of their time.

- At one point in the workshop, I did wonder if I was out of my element dealing with a subtle psychological issue that did not reveal itself before the workshop. Because of my training and experience as a board-certified healthcare chaplain, I can usually recognize when I need to refer someone whose needs are beyond my skill set. I had both a psychologist and a psychotherapist on my Site Team, but did not choose to discuss the matter with either of them until later. This is a clear signal to me to a) trust my instincts and respond to red flags, and b) collaborate more readily!
- *Use of the Site Team:* I had a sterling Site Team of enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and professional people who worked well together and supported me throughout the process. I could have involved them more in the project, especially in evaluating me as facilitator of the workshops. Also, we could have met more often for the incredibly useful advice and brain-storming they provided, but again, I was less than well organized. I did request from the Team that one person take over scheduling meetings, but when that met with silence, I let it drop. At the very least I should have asked for one person to stay in close touch with my progress to report to the team and schedule meetings when warranted.

- *Economic/Educational Level of Group:* I purposely chose two venues where I could be fairly certain that the educational level would be at least high school, if not higher. In my own anxiety about venturing into altogether new territory with this project, I offered it to people who would likely be able to engage in this project as co-researchers. I'd hoped for cultural, racial, and religious diversity and did get some of that, but I was not looking for educational or intellectual diversity. In fact, this project would not be suitable for anyone with a severe cognitive or neurological disability who would have difficulty reading, writing and engaging in discussion, but neither did it garner information about whether a less sophisticated group would benefit from it. Also, would these ideas about a final stage of life be comprehensible to people who were already in despair about aging and thus not living to the fullest in this stage? These are limitations of the study.
- *Deviation from the Proposal:* I had hoped to use literary arts more extensively in both the research and the workshops, both literature and film. Time prohibited the use of movies in the workshops; in whatever time we had, the review of personal stories was far more important to the participants. Even in my research, especially in Chapter 2, "The Importance of Stories," although I made a valiant effort to include *King Lear* and contemporary films in the research, they were simply not relevant to what I was trying to explain about the personal stories we develop and tell. I did, however, indulge in poetry for the epigraphs for each chapter. The search for the right lines was the first task of writing each chapter, a way to clarify my own intent as well as a directional sign for the reader. Each epigraph became both my thesis statement and my prayer for what followed.

REPLICATION OF THE PROJECT:

- *Location:* Choose a space well in advance that will be conducive to discussion, with good acoustics, comfortable chairs around a table, easy access, and pleasant surroundings. The space in which the workshop takes place is critically important to the formation of the group as a safe, comfortable place for self-disclosure.
- Some sort of presentation is necessary to inform prospective participants about the workshop and this really is best done verbally, rather than by brochures or flyers, thereby inviting discussion. The presentation itself is informative, even if people go no further.
- Set a minimum age. While I thought sixty-five would be appropriate, given that many people consider that retirement age, I found that sixty-five-year-olds in general were still on the fringes of middle age, especially in an economy where people are retiring later. Once a person is “in her seventies” however, both psychological and cultural attitudes seem more attuned to accepting elderhood.
- The group should be self-selecting and share some commonalities. If the first session functions as a “pre-workshop” session, to which people are invited after being screened by the facilitator, the prospective participants can judge for themselves whether or not they would be comfortable in the group and able to meet the commitment. The content of this first session would be the same as it was in this project, but the option to continue or not would be offered and discussed.
- The group should be kept to eight or less. Assuming that everyone will attend *most* sessions, that will allow the minimum amount of time for each person to be heard in each session.

- Insist on commitment to be present at all sessions (excluding emergencies or illness) and to do the written work. Emphasize the personal value to be gained as well as the responsibility to group process.
- In initial interviews, be alert for signs that someone may not be emotionally able to engage his or her past. This process is intense; be sure people are well informed and prepared for the intensity. Try to refer those rejected for the project to another resource that could be helpful.
- Screen for ability to physically engage in the group. Someone profoundly hard of hearing may be able to do the written work outside of the group, but will miss the important conversations—and community building—that occurs during the sessions. Is this acceptable, and if so, how will this person be supported? Likewise, if someone is visually impaired, it is important to set up whatever support is needed before the real work begins.
- Expand the workshop to seven sessions and allow one session to be left open to group choice. Several members of the Kendal group encouraged others to read Joan Chittister's book, *The Gift of Years*, and a discussion of her ideas would have been useful. In the MG group, participants were particularly well versed in the arts, which could have generated a discussion of aging as portrayed in the arts. One session could also be devoted to seeing a film together that deals specifically with aging, such as *On Golden Pond*, *The Bucket List*, or *Driving Miss Daisy*. And given the importance of storytelling to these groups, as well as to all elders, an additional session to rewrite or reflect in more depth on one's personal myth would be well spent. Again, the group should have some input into the content of the sessions, as the Kendal group did when it requested a session on dying and death.

- The content of the surveys and homework questionnaires was appropriate, but as with all written materials, the font size should be increased to at least 14 point.
- Prepare reading materials beforehand. These materials may be the facilitator's introduction to each session, plus other appropriate writings. These should be given to participants when the workshop begins so they can be read at each person's own pace. Have a questionnaire for the follow-up interviews. Evaluate not only the workshop and how well it served its purpose, but also make this one-to-one interview a time for people to express feelings and ideas that came up and were not expressed to the group. While this adds to information gathered from the project, it also functions as closure for each person and recommendations for whatever needs follow-up.
- Despite some limitations in this project, there are certain things it did achieve that were critical to the original challenge:
 - It pointed out to those engaged in the workshop that they were meant to grow—especially spiritually—until they died. Every one of the participants in these groups was still actively engaged in activities, in reading and learning, and in looking forward. However, that attitude of continued growth can be diminished by accident or illness, as is the case with so many of patients I meet in the hospital. Joan Erikson wrote in her addition to Erik Erikson's book, *The Life Cycle Completed*, that in one's nineties,

Even the best-cared-for bodies begin to weaken and do not function as they once did. In spite of every effort to maintain strength and control, the body continues to lose its autonomy. Despair, which haunts the eighth stage, is a close companion in the ninth because it is almost impossible to know what emergencies and losses of physical ability are imminent....To

face down despair with faith and appropriate humility is perhaps the wisest course.¹⁰⁵

- It created a safe place for discussion of spiritual growth that was not confined by religion. This opened their understanding of spirituality and affirmed them in the ways they had found to bring peace to their spirits: watching the river, reading good books, listening to classical music, journaling. Not only did “spiritual” not need to be affiliated with “religion,” thereby banishing any lingering guilt about religious practice or lack thereof, but the workshop granted permission to pursue ideas for the increase of spiritual joy that were unique to each individual.
- It instigated organized reflection on past lives and focused thinking about the future. Several members of the Kendal group recently talked about doing the workshop again with greater commitment on their part. Having begun the process of reflecting on their personal stories only whetted their appetite to go deeper. The work with legacies and ethical wills prompted them to be sure that their hard-earned lessons would not be forgotten when they died. For those so inclined, this could encourage them toward mentoring others.
- In both groups, the workshop created a community whose participants came away with trusted collaborators to whom they could turn for further discussion, if they chose. Once a person allows him- or herself to be vulnerable to others, a bond is formed, and that was the case in both of these groups. The Kendal group continues to meet and to care for one another outside of meetings. Before we began, some of them barely knew one another. I suspect the three remaining members of the MG group

¹⁰⁵ Joan M. Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 105-6.

would readily respond to one another if their support was needed, and these people did not know one another at all before the workshop.

Again, the relative homogeneity of these groups precludes knowing whether this project would work in other populations, but even if it is limited to those who can still read, write, and engage in discussion, I believe it has been a worthwhile project, providing information for even more productive workshops in the future. I believe my thirteen co-researchers would agree.

CHAPTER 10 MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES

*Work is its own cure. You have to
like it better than being loved.*

—Marge Piercy, “For the young who want to”

1. COMPETENCY: PEER DELEGATION (Ability as multi-faith leader, #7)¹⁰⁶

The Candidate wants to learn to delegate responsibility to capable people in a more collegial and effective way.

Strategies:

- A. Request assistance from Site Team member Sherrie Dulworth to help improve delegation skills.
- B. Identify two professionals with whom she works who delegate effectively (*not* in a managerial role, but with peers). Observe their style and discuss their methods with them.
- C. Discuss ways to delegate within professional chaplaincy with Certification Peer Review Committee.

Evaluation:

- A. Request feedback from Sherrie Dulworth, and from Sister Gloria Jean Henchy, who will participate in the Certification Peer Review Committee.
- B. Write about and discuss with Site Team:

¹⁰⁶ See Appendix 1, Chapter 6 “Ministerial Competencies.”

1. What was learned from B and C above;
2. Whether or not the information learned was integrated into her working style.

Action:

This has been a particularly useful learning experience for me. As is true in other competencies as well, I've gained not only new insights, but also greater awareness of what I already know and do intuitively.

The project that was most useful in this competency was one I did not anticipate when I wrote the proposal for my demonstration project. Over the last two years, I've been the torchbearer for bringing the Schwartz Rounds program to Phelps Hospital. When we finally had sufficient involvement to make it happen, it was necessary for me to step back and turn some of my work over to others, which was not easy!

Schwartz Rounds is a program from The Schwartz Center at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, the brainchild of Kenneth B. Schwartz, a healthcare attorney who suffered with and eventually died of cancer. He said that his relationship with staff "made the unbearable bearable," and in his last year put his money and energy to work establishing The Schwartz Center for Compassionate Healthcare. The program, which as of September 2012 is running in 242 hospitals in the U.S. and 14 in the UK, is a multi-disciplinary forum for staff to discuss cases. It is neither a clinical nor a problem-solving forum, but one that allows for discussion of emotional, spiritual, social, and psychological responses to the work, something rarely available and desperately needed by healthcare workers. The Rounds in each hospital work in close relationship to the Schwartz Center, which demands regular reports and evaluations.

I bought the program to Phelps through my own Pastoral Care Advisory Committee, having learned of its success in several Chicago hospitals. For two years, a small group of us tried to make it happen but with frustratingly little success. We had a willing and able facilitator but needed a physician leader. Only when that doctor joined us, having experienced the Rounds in another hospital, did we begin rapidly to move forward (soon after my proposal was approved by NYTS). In September 2012 we held our first Rounds. We ordered food for 30 people; reserved a room that would hold 40 people; and counted 70 people at this first session. There was no doubt that the hospital needed this forum!

I introduced the program to Phelps. I called meetings of the committee and sent out e-mail summaries of the meetings, posed questions, stayed in contact with the Schwartz Center, set up conference calls. But *only* when other people took on responsibility for making things happen did it finally move forward. Someone had to be the midwife and that was me, but then I had to step back and let the work be divided among others. Not easy, but clearly necessary. Now I loosely facilitate the planning committee meetings and summarize them through e-mail so everyone is current, and I am still the liaison with Boston. I also oversee publicity, but with the help of a team member from Marketing. Others plan the sessions, invite the panelists, set meetings, order food, organize rehearsals, and recruit new committee members. I'm often the one who notices what is left undone, who then asks others, "Who will do this?"

It is also in the Schwartz Rounds project that I was able to observe and discuss with colleagues their comfort with peer delegation. What was obvious was this: *those who easily delegated to others had already taken on some task or commitment of their own*. B, who had shepherded our contract from the Schwartz Center through our senior administration, could

ask a social worker in his department to choose someone for the panel. P, who of necessity misses many of the planning meetings, contributed some of her assistant's time to reserve rooms and order food. R, who designed and laminated signage for the Rounds will not work on this next session but will be a presenter for the following one.

Had I not stepped back and asked others to contribute, several things could have occurred. The more astute members of the planning committee would have *insisted* I back off. Or, already too busy, members would have lost interest and dropped away. In either case, Schwartz Rounds at Phelps would not be the success it is. In the process of "letting go and letting others," I experienced again what I've always known was true: the more people invest in something, the more ownership they take in it.

Less useful to this competency was my peer review in Sept. 2011. Required every five years for board certified chaplains by the Association of Professional Chaplains, this is a meeting among invited colleagues to discuss topics of my choosing. I did raise the issue of my reluctance to delegate and they concluded that I still feel the need to prove myself to others: "See how hard I work, see how well I work." They suggested it was time to relax and enjoy the fruits of my labors. This did not ring true to me at all, but I was unable to dissuade them from their (to me) surprising analysis. As for "rest" of any sort, that has never and still does not appeal to me. I'm much too curious about too many things to stop and rest. I came away from the peer review with the strong feeling that my colleagues were projecting, or to be more blunt: talking to themselves about themselves. If I, their peer, will not rest on my laurels, should they feel guilty about doing so themselves?

Outcome and Relevance:

In conversation with site team member, Sherrie Dulworth, she pointed out that not only did this project give me practical experience in sharing work with others and not feeling obliged to do the lioness' share, but in combination with the time-consuming work of writing this thesis, I'm becoming more adept at rationing my time, energy and creativity by saying "no" more often. She did point out, however, that I'm still reluctant to impose on others for help when I am the only *obvious* beneficiary. Another site team member, Bob Berson, cautioned me not "to deprive others of the benefit of helping you."

Consideration of this competency did impact favorably on my project groups. I gave them a lot of homework to do and I did not try to soften it for them. The relationships formed and the depths of our discussions were, I believe, evidence of our mutual investment in the work. I began by feeling guilty about asking so much of people who owed me nothing, but the results of their involvement have been deeply satisfying for all of us.

2. COMPETENCY: PERSONAL SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT (Spiritual Leader, #10)

The Candidate will seek and try different spiritual experiences to deepen her own spiritual life and as a model for those who participate in her Demonstration Project.

Strategies:

- A. Request assistance from Site Team member, Sister Gloria Jean Henchy to help identify ways to creatively expand her own spiritual life.
- B. Meet with the Rev. Dr. Mary Lou Howson, whose Doctor of Ministry project focused on Teresa of Avila, to learn more about how Teresa understood spirituality and aging.
- C. Attend Christian worship at two places whose worship differs from her own tradition: Antioch Baptist Church in Bedford Hills and a Quaker meeting in Mt. Kisco.
- D. Set aside retreat time at Holy Cross Monastery and meet there with a spiritual director.

Evaluation:

- A. Keep a journal of B, C and D above.
- B. Write a new Rule of Life (last done 21 years ago).
- C. Request feedback from Sister Gloria Jean as this progresses.
- D. Write about this process and elicit feedback from the Site Team.

Action:

- A. Met with Sister Gloria Jean Henchy CDP to discuss the outcome of the strategies and the current state of my spiritual journey.
- B. The meeting with the Rev. Dr. Mary Lou Howson did not take place, but brief research on Teresa of Avila showed that her writings would not be particularly helpful to me in this competency.

- C. I attended Sunday worship at two local and very appealing churches: Antioch Baptist Church, a large, active Black Baptist Church in my neighborhood. I also attended a meeting at the Croton Valley Friends Meeting in Mt. Kisco, the next town south from my own.
- D. I went on retreat with a group of Episcopal women priests to Holy Cross Monastery, an Episcopal monastery in West Park, NY. During this retreat, I met with one of the monks, Brother Scott Wesley Bordon, the Prior of the monastery for spiritual direction.
- E. Reviewed with Site Team.

Reflection:

For the last 11 years, since I left parish ministry, I have been challenged to find a worshipping community. I have been warmly welcomed at my daughter's Episcopal church where she is the music director, but have not felt called to become a member. I found worship with an order of Episcopal nuns deeply satisfying, but the sisters moved to Georgia.

For this competency, I chose two houses of worship to attend, each for a different reason. In my hospital work, I minister to many African American Baptists and I am impressed that so many of them live out a deeply integrated, *practical* faith that informs their entire lives. I chose to worship at Antioch to see more of that faith, to get to know an important congregation in my neighborhood and to experience a church service very different and much more lively than my own typical Episcopal worship.

I spent a delightful two hours with the people of Antioch, who could not have been friendlier or more pleased to welcome me. The service in the packed church was full of music—Antioch's choir is known throughout the county—and everyone in that large, packed

church sang and clapped with them. The sermon was more basic and repetitive than what I am used to but delivered with gusto and constant response from the congregation. There was sharing of news, a time of greeting, a long time for prayers of thanks and intercession, and an atmosphere of joy and praise the entire time. I came away uplifted—and exhausted.

Although very glad I went, I felt as if I had attended an *event*, rather than worship. Having spent 40 years as a Catholic and 30 as an Episcopalian, I'm rather partial to sacramental worship, to the drama of the formal liturgy, to the silences and reverent moments that punctuate the service, to the chanting of psalms and the singing of familiar hymns of poetry set to music. I'm still impressed, but not drawn by the Black Baptist tradition.

Seeking then the quiet that has always been appealing to me, I attended the Croton Valley Friends Meeting that same month. The meetinghouse is an 18th century stone building with a working fireplace and no air conditioning. This was August 2011, all the windows were open and the background to an hour's communal meditation was the sound of birds and bugs and the occasional car passing on unpaved Meeting House Road. There were only seven of us that Sunday, and only one person spoke during the hour about the need to kill weeds in his driveway and the spiritual questions that rose for him. (I later advised him that table salt worked as well as pesticides.)

The hour was restorative for me. In seminary at Yale Divinity School, chapel worship was different every day, depending on who led the service. Only on the day the Quakers held a meeting was the chapel full. Every Episcopal, Catholic, Baptist, Presbyterian, every flavor of Christian student and most faculty members attended those meetings and like me, likely came away refreshed. In fact, when I left parish ministry in 2001 after an unpleasant

experience as rector of a parish, I briefly considered joining a Quaker meeting. So this summer Sunday was very pleasant indeed, but again, not what I need for regular worship.

A short experiment, perhaps, but I came away more convinced than ever that the church of my choosing, the Episcopal Church, is my spiritual home. But I still have not found the parish or community where I can fully and comfortably worship as a priest in the pews.

Going on retreat was a return to something that has been most satisfying in the past. I am an associate of the Episcopal Order of St. Helena, a religious community of sisters, who had been located at Vails Gate, NY until a few years ago. When they consolidated their properties and moved to one of their houses in Augusta, GA, I lost a place of regular retreat, spiritual direction, the most pleasing worship I had ever attended and the proximity of several close friends. When I met with Brother Scott at Holy Cross, an order closely associated with OSH, he suggested I create a ritual to mark my separation and the beginning of my severing of ties with OSH. I immediately decided that it should be a pilgrimage to their present convent.

In June 2012, I spent most of a week there, especially with two sisters with whom I had a long, close relationship, both of them living in a nursing home (one has since died). But my pilgrimage to the order served its purpose: the sisters, many of whom are new and unknown to me, their new location, their plans to build a new convent, all of it had little relation to me. They had been my spiritual touchstone, but were no longer so and I am able to grieve the loss.

More than 20 years ago I wrote a Rule of Life as part of being received as an associate of OSH. It included a lot of “shoulds” and “oughts” and no longer makes sense in

my life. In the Episcopal Church during that same time there has been a growing emphasis on living into our Baptismal Covenant, which we reaffirm several times a year. The first part of it is a responsive version of the Nicene Creed, which is said at most celebrations of Holy Eucharist. It contains the basic teachings of the Christian Church as the Anglican Communion has received it. I have prayed and taught every aspect of this creed, but I've grown to find that the details are no longer as important as once they were. I do not disbelieve the teachings; I simply no longer need for them to be absolutely true and set in stone.

The Baptismal Covenant¹⁰⁷

<i>Celebrant</i>	Do you believe in God the Father?
<i>People</i>	I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
<i>Celebrant</i>	Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?
<i>People</i>	I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
<i>Celebrant</i>	Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?
<i>People</i>	I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Once we express our beliefs, the second part of the creed demands appropriate action. This is, I think, the most fully realizable Rule of Life for me at this stage of my life. Until I attempted to write a Rule of Life, however, I didn't realize that I already had one.

<i>Celebrant</i>	Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?
<i>People</i>	I will, with God's help.
<i>Celebrant</i>	Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

¹⁰⁷ The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979) 304-5.

<i>People</i>	I will, with God's help.
<i>Celebrant</i>	Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?
<i>People</i>	I will, with God's help.
<i>Celebrant</i>	Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?
<i>People</i>	I will, with God's help.
<i>Celebrant</i>	Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?
<i>People</i>	I will, with God's help.

Outcome and relevance:

Interestingly, I find myself precisely where so many of the elders with whom I've worked find themselves: religiously adrift, missing what we once had, while deeply connected to the God whose attributes have become fuzzier even while the Presence has grown stronger. And after this bit of exploration, I am content with that. However, one thing has come clearly out of this demonstration project: the need for community. I do miss being part of a spiritual community and I will continue to seek one. It will have to include mature questioners, like me.

In addition to the proposed work on this competency, however, my research on Mary Magdalene and the non-canonical writings (Chapter 2) reawakened a long-forgotten attraction to the theology contained in these writings of the Christianity that lost the canonical battle. I intend to investigate it further.

3. COMPETENCY: EVIDENCE-BASED MINISTRY (Administrator, #12)

In order to practice being more goal-oriented rather than reactive, the Candidate will study evidence-based procedures in healthcare.

Strategies:

- A. Request assistance from Site Team member Amy Hendler to identify ways to be more focused on goals in pastoral ministry, focusing on “evidence-based chaplaincy.”
- B. Read literature on evidence-based pastoral care, and discuss with other professional chaplains who use it, particularly the Rev. Jay Risk, BCC in Chicago.
- C. Discuss evidence-based chaplaincy with her Certification Peer Review Committee and Stellaris Chaplains.
- D. Improve goal setting (by participants) in Clinical Pastoral Training program.
- E. Read material by Paul Wachtel on problems with the evidence-based treatment approach in mental health.

Evaluation:

- A. Evaluate in writing what was learned about evidence-based chaplaincy and whether or not it proves useful for my pastoral care work.
- B. Evaluate with CPT students the value of goal setting.
- C. Write about goal setting and elicit feedback from Site Team.

Action:

- A. Met with Amy Hendler to sort out response to other actions.
- B. Read literature and reviewed notes from several Association of Professional Chaplains Conference workshops on evidence-based pastoral care. Discussed the

subject by phone with two APC presenters, the Rev. Jay Risk, BCC and the Rev. George Fitchett, PhD, BCC.

- C. Brought the subject up in my Peer Review Committee in Spring 2012.
- D. Emphasized goal setting and evaluation with my 2011–2012 CPT group.
- E. Read article by Paul Wachtel critical of evidence-based practice.
- F. Attended a weeklong workshop at Duke University in July 2012, “Spirituality and Health Research Workshop.”
- G. Discussed with Site Team (12/1/12).

Reflection:

The profession of healthcare chaplaincy has sought, from its inception as a distinct discipline in the 1930s, to model itself on the medical profession with which it works. Thus three years of specialized graduate school (medical school/seminary), an internship (in my case, serving as assistant to the Catholic chaplain at Wesleyan University for an academic year), a residency (four 400-hour units of Clinical Pastoral Education) and some thousands of hours of supervised work in the field, plus written material for board certification. It is only lately, however, that chaplaincy began seeking to demonstrate in clinical trials that we, too, can use and write about evidence-based practice. Today chaplains are expected to be research-literate, using clinical research and whenever possible, participating in clinical trials.

There is considerable resistance to this by professional healthcare chaplains. When I brought this to my peer review committee, there was little interest. The response was that we know what we do and how we do it and should just continue to do it to the best of our ability.

Likewise, last year's CPT group, none of whom were working chaplains, were not receptive to discussion of evidence-based practice but were able to track the fulfillment of their personal goals, which they wrote at the beginning of the program. I did a better job of keeping them on track with their goals than I had with other groups, but I'm not at all convinced that it made them better pastoral caregivers.

The conversations with Chaplain Risk and Dr. Fitchett proved more fruitful. Having attended the workshop at Duke, I now had a good idea what clinical research in the area of spirituality/religion and health looked like. With Chaplain Risk I explored this question: How can I, one chaplain working alone four-fifths time in a 240 bed hospital, incorporate the principles of evidence-based pastoral care into my practice? We agreed that while education and training had always been available and in fact, required of us, standardization and measurement has not. The APC is in the process of writing standards for various categories of chaplains, my own category of acute-care hospital chaplaincy having been the first set of standards to be published, but we are still lacking in ways to measure the efficacy of what we do.

The conversation with George Fitchett, associate professor and director of research in preventive medicine at Rush University, continued this conversation. Dr. Fitchett suggested ways to develop a case study with nurses and then publish my findings, possibly in the *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling*. This idea is intriguing.

Paul L. Wachtel, in his article "Beyond 'ESTs': Problematic Assumptions in the Pursuit of Evidence-Based Practice,"¹⁰⁸ presents a strong argument *against* depending on evidence-based practice (or "empirically supported treatment", the 'ESTs' of the title). His

¹⁰⁸ Paul L. Wachtel, "Beyond 'ESTs': Problematic Assumptions in the Pursuit of Evidence-Based Practice" in *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 27 (2010) n. 3, 251-272.

arguments include the fact that often, psychiatric treatment involves not solving the problem, but helping the patient to *identify* the problem. He further notes that the required manualization of the practice limits the practitioner from using his/her full palette of interventions (a complaint among healthcare chaplains as well). He questions the ethics of Randomized Clinical Trials (RCTs) in the field of mental health (as did Jay Risk), of leaving patients who need treatment without treatment. And he objects to the implication that those therapies *not* on the list of clinically approved evidence-based practices are less effective just because there is no hard and published evidence to support them. In short, he questions the degree to which we are becoming enslaved to evidence. His arguments can also be applied to healthcare chaplaincy, which is one of the reasons many chaplains resist it.

Outcome and Relevance:

While I'd hoped that work on this competency would help me be more goal-oriented rather than reactive in my pastoral work, what it really did was give me a much greater understanding of the methodology of research. A good methodology course in the first year of the NYTS Doctor of Ministry program would have, should have, provided this deeper understanding of the nature of research, but the course designated for that purpose focused only on preparing the proposal for our demonstration project. I'm glad I followed up on my own. It has given me an overview of my project that I might have missed had I focused only on the required details.

4. COMPETENCY: SMALL GROUP DYNAMICS (Organizer, #13)

The Candidate will deepen her understanding of small group leadership dynamics and process development and become more comfortable using it both as CPT supervisor and in her Demonstration Project.

Strategies:

- A. Request assistance from Site Team members Bob Berson and Jamie Pfeiffer, both of whom have professional experience with small group process.
- B. From their recommendations and other sources, choose two books and two articles to read.
- C. Apply what is learned to next class of Clinical Pastoral Training.

Evaluation:

- A. From the reading and experience, raise five relevant questions about small group process.
- B. Meet with Bob Berson and Jamie Pfeiffer to discuss questions.
- C. Write a self-evaluation and elicit feedback from the Site Team.

Action:

- A. Met with site team members Bob Berson and Jamie Pfeiffer for discussion.
- B. Read two books: *Experiences in Groups and Other Papers* by W.R. Bion and *Where Two or Three are Gathered* by Daniel L. Prechtel.
- C. Discussed with site team.

Reflection:

Both Bob Berson and Jamie Pfeiffer in their professional lives have led therapy groups, and the book they recommended by W.R. Bion, although a classic study in group

dynamics, pertained mostly to therapy groups. Bion was the first to note what goes on in groups. I struggled through it and found places where the author articulated what I knew intuitively, but in general, it was not relevant to my work. I did appreciate his list of what constitutes a “good group”: a common purpose, common recognition of boundaries by group members, capacity to absorb new members, freedom from internal sub-groups with exclusive boundaries, group valuing of each member’s contribution, ability to face discontent within the group and deal with it, and a minimum of three members.¹⁰⁹ There were no surprises here for me, but I would not have been able to compose this list myself.

Bion also noted a fact that has surfaced in other places in this research: that the individual although seemingly isolated, is “a group animal” whose psychology can only be fully understood when that person is regarded as part of some group.¹¹⁰

The second book I read was written primarily for spiritual direction in small groups.¹¹¹ One chapter in particular, “Leading a Small Group,” was precisely the information I needed. Again, the material was not new to me, but having it articulated in an organized manner made it more accessible to me. The book was overtly Christian and the theological basis for the author’s stated principles also recommended the book for me. Although I work in a multi-faith setting, and often with people who claim no faith tradition, my own Christian faith informs what I do.

Outcome and relevance:

¹⁰⁹ W.R. Bion, *Experiences in Groups and Other Papers* (London: Tavistock Publications Limited, 1961), 25-26.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 132-33.

¹¹¹ Daniel L. Prechtel, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Spiritual Direction for Small Groups* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2012).

Lists are good things, and these books (I did not find any useful articles) provided enough lists to convince me that what I have been doing as a small group facilitator is on the mark. This competency, however, is on-going. I have not raised the five questions promised in the evaluation above, which may mean that I have no questions on this subject or that I have not yet gotten to the heart of what I need to know. In any case, the information gained served as a plumb line to keep me focused on group process as I facilitated my project groups.

CHAPTER 11 CONCLUSION

*Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made;
Our times are in his hand
Who saith, A whole I planned.
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all nor be afraid*
Robert Browning, "Rabbi Ben Ezra"

*A poet named Robert Browning
eloped with a poetess named Elizabeth Barrett,
And since he had an independent income
they lived in an Italian villa instead of a London garret.
He created quite a furor
With his elusive caesura.
He also created a youthful sage,
A certain Rabbi Ben Ezra who urged
people to hurry up and age.
This fledgling said, Grow old along with me,
The best is yet to be.
I term him fledgeling because such a statement, certes,
Could emanate only from a youngster in his thirties.*
Ogden Nash, "Old is for the Books"

Robert Browning was, in fact, fifty-seven when he wrote "Rabbi Ben Ezra," but Ogden Nash was only *twenty-nine* when he poked fun at it in "Old is for the Books." Neither one had yet achieved the wisdom possible in old age, but they were well on their way: one anticipating what could be the joy of old age, the other, younger poet, poking fun at such idealism. Whether or not the elder years are the best for which the first are made depends on how a person spends them. I hope, and will work toward those years being a time of peace and satisfaction for elderly people, who still have much to do, much for which to live.

Four thousand years ago, the *vedic* sages knew that every stage of life had its own reason, its own task, and the *complete* life must account for all the stages. Erik Erikson updated those *vedic* principles for our own time in his Stages of Life, again assigning to every age unique work to be done. Others built on Erikson's work, but the bottom line for all the systems of human development is that a person continues to grow and change from birth to death. It seems so obvious, and yet the people, mostly hospital patients, who inspired me to engage this study so often felt that life essentially ended when they could no longer earn a salary or take care of their families. When they needed to be supported by others, they had passed their usefulness. American culture, unlike Asian or Native American culture, perpetuates that idea.

In fact, the work to be done near the end of life is primarily spiritual, but the places where one would expect to find spiritual support for *all* ages—churches, synagogues, and other faith communities—put their greatest efforts into teaching and supporting children and youth and their parents. Middle-aged congregants may still hold leadership roles or work on committees, but the elderly, who are usually tired of “doing” and not up to it physically—they are often marginalized. They still say the prayers, receive the sacraments, and observe the holidays, but their financial contribution is minimal, they can't read in a dimly lit sanctuary, and they may doze during a sermon they can't hear. If they no longer drive, they may not be able to attend services and except for the occasional home visit, the clergy and congregations do not miss them. All this at the very time when elders most need support to do the very important spiritual work that they were created to do in old age and which, ultimately, affords them the deep peace and satisfaction of a life story complete, even if ongoing.

Out of that spiritual process of reflecting, reconciling, forgiving oneself and others and ultimately drawing out the meaning and purpose of one's life, comes not just individual peace, but wisdom –and wisdom is the gift the elder offers back to the world. It does not come automatically at a certain age; wisdom must be the product of observation and insight, of knowledge and experience, but it *is* the work of our late years. Too many people, however, settle for feeling useless and unproductive, a burden to their families and worst of all, deeply saddened and wondering, “Is that all there is?” And with that malaise, comes physical deterioration, the one feeding the other.

I believe there is a better way to age, and that is what this project has been about. The results have been heartening. With my co-researchers, we discovered that connectedness and community are vitally important. As Sam Deibler told me (see the Introduction), “We are not meant to grow in isolation.” We also learned the importance of storytelling—of refining our own stories and being able to tell them to others who listen and care about us. But in addition to the need for community/connectedness and opportunities to tell and listen to stories, we discovered the value of affirming this as the work we are meant to be doing at this age. Of course, most healthy adults are doing far more with their days than reflecting on their lives. The *vedic* directives for the forest people would not work for twenty-first century elders! But those important questions about meaning and purpose should be ever-present to the elder. This is the age to answer those questions. This is the age to make sense of all that came before.

This project has been transformative for me on many levels. What started as a suspicion about aging, spirituality and religion, which I wanted to explore, has now become a conviction: that elders have unique work to do that is primarily spiritual, and that there is

blessed little support for them in this important work. I can imagine writing a book whose title might be, *Do We Outgrow Religion?* because the way religion is practiced today, with overwhelming emphasis on children and youth, and the survival of the institution, the answer, I think, would be “yes.” I want to point to the ways we are failing our elders and tell about how that can be changed. When I hear clergy fret about the “greying” of their congregations, I want to shout at them: “Do you realize what a *fabulous* opportunity you have to do God’s work?” I’ve long cared about this subject; now I have more knowledge to support what I believe.

My own vague plan for retirement was that after a career working with people, I would devote a good part of my time to working with animals. Now I’m not so sure. There’s too much more to be done. I have begun mumbling to the Kendal group that I’m thinking of doing the workshop again at Kendal and several have said they would love to do it *again* in order to go deeper. The idea of repeating the workshop and building on what I learned in the first go-around is very appealing.

And the Kendal group does continue, meeting once a month. We have addressed the issue that stayed undercover in the workshop: *Do we still believe in God?* How is that different from what we felt in younger years? An important subject has been the Quaker values on which Kendal revolves—or *should* revolve. How do these values affect everyday life at Kendal, and the lives of the members of the Kendal group. Several members of the group are, on their own, struggling with difficult issues that surfaced in the workshop and while not sharing their details with the group, are pleased to know they have the genuine support of the other group members. I could not have foreseen the blessedness of this group, and I fully realize that such blessings are waiting to fall on other people, in other groups.

Transformation has also come in my professional life. Now when I talk to older patients who are newly disabled and terrified about losing their independence, or retired people who no longer have a discernable purpose to their lives, I hear not just their pain, but the deeply-buried hope that there is some good to come out of their situation. “Perhaps *different* does not necessarily mean *worse*...let me help you grieve for what you’ve lost, and find the seeds of what is life-giving to you.”

Writing the chapter on Rebekah and Mary Magdalene became a profound experience for me. I meant it to be the stories of two ordinary women whose lives became a legacy for all of us who inherit The Story. What about all those unnamed women in the Bible? Should their stories be told? Should they be given names? The study of women in the Bible is not new to me, but clearly, there’s more to be done.

And the non-canonical gospels have opened an entire new Christian story and one that makes so much more sense to me. There is already a new pile of books on my desk for this spiritual and theological exploration.

I have avoided discussing theology in this thesis and in fact, throughout the project so that those who do not relate to God could still participate fully. I believe more than before that every person is, in fact, inseparable body, mind and *spirit*, and the spiritual dimension need not relate to religion in order to be valid. But my own relationship with God in Christ informed the work I’ve done here. I believe that God created us to live life abundantly, to be in communion with the Holy and with each other, spirit to spirit to Spirit. And although Erikson *et al* observed and described human development, the original design was the Lord’s own. And for this, even God deserves a “Well Done!.” Praise the Lord!

The older I get, the less I *know* about God, but recognize more clearly than when I was younger the *presence* of God. I believe that Presence has been in this project from the beginning, blessing it, blessing my co-researchers, blessing me.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

DEMONSTRATION PROJECT PROPOSAL

WISDOM-MAKING:
A SPIRITUAL JOB DESCRIPTION FOR ELDERS

BY

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A DEMONSTRATION PROJECT PROPOSAL

New York Theological Seminary

December 20, 2011

CHALLENGE STATEMENT

In my work as a healthcare chaplain at Phelps Memorial Hospital Center, I provide pastoral care for adults from various (or no) faith traditions. My patients are mostly over 65, many suffering from spiritual dreariness and a sense of meaninglessness. Old spiritual habits no longer satisfy them and religious institutions offer little creative support. Without age-appropriate spiritual encouragement, many of these people will die spiritually long before physical death. My Demonstration Project proposes to address this situation by developing a program for spiritual awakening specifically designed for elders.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING
The place on which you stand is Holy Ground

Personal Introduction

There are only a few events in my life that I wanted so desperately that I actually feared some calamity would occur that would deprive me of my goal at the last minute. One of those events was ordination to the Episcopal priesthood. Paranoia is not something on which I normally waste time, but I remember fearing that a car accident would interrupt my journey to the church on the day of my ordination – April 14, 1991. For years before that, I had yearned to stand at the altar, even sometimes physically *leaning* toward that place where I knew I belonged. Although I was expected to preach, teach, administer and pastorally support my “flock,” it was the privilege and responsibility of being a *sacramentalist* that was my deepest calling.

How perplexing it is to me, then, that while I continue to administer the sacraments, it has become a well-executed duty and no longer my passion. But if I don’t stand at the altar, where do I stand? In my late sixties now, I have realized for most of this decade that I must identify another call, must seek to understand what it is that moves me and others at this age in our spiritual journeys. A decade into ordained ministry, I recognized that congregational life was boring to me, and downright annoying at times. I left congregational ministry in 2001 after three years in a mismatched relationship with a parish whose wants and needs did

not align with my own, and only years later did I realize that that one bad experience of parish ministry was my burning bush. God had other plans for me.

In clinical pastoral care, I have found my call to service again. I engage in the stories that other people tell and I help them to find meaning in them. First as a Hospice chaplain, then as the Coordinator of Pastoral Care for a community hospital, I meet people where they are in the moment. My personal mission is to help them find the Holy in their lives, however they define the Holy (and it is occasionally without recognition of the presence of God), and then I get out of the way. But I take their stories, bless them and turn them over to God so that I can live my own stories unencumbered.

However, just as one identifies with characters or situations in good books or engrossing films, I identify more with some patients than others. I am trained to know the shape of transference and countertransference, but there are simply stories that arouse my sympathy and empathy more than others. Invariably, these are the stories of older adults, elders who are struggling, as I am, to find the spiritual role that will satisfy them at this stage of their lives. It is the American way to appreciate productivity, so many elders seek to continue to *do*, to *act*, to *produce* and that is not in itself a bad thing. But I believe we are also called, *primarily* called, to *be*, to *reflect*, to reject old ways that no longer satisfy, to seek creative and fulfilling new ways to be Holy People.

The Welsh poet R.S. Thomas wrote about the cynicism that often afflicts elders who find that their old religion no longer works:

*Yes, I know what he is like:
a kind of impossible robot
you insert your prayers into
like tickets, that after a while
are returned to you with the words
“Not granted” written upon them.*

*I repudiate such a god.*¹¹²

I encounter many, many people who have given up on institutional religion and the god that goes with it, and either because of the bad taste left with them or because they are ignorant of spiritual alternatives, they have no idea what their spiritual needs may be or how to meet them. Even those still involved in organized religion are often unsatisfied, although they may not admit it to themselves, much less to their clergy. These are the people, whose needs are akin to my own, to whom I want to offer spiritual experiences that will feed them.

The Setting: The Hospital in which I've Identified the Problem

Phelps Memorial Hospital Center is located above the eastern shore of the Hudson River in Sleepy Hollow, New York. Licensed for 240 beds, it has a daily census that varies between 120 and 200, most of whom live in the hospital's catchment area. Because of its exceptional orthopedic staff, and the fact that the Memorial Sloan Kettering Westchester Cancer Center is onsite, some patients do come from all over Westchester County and beyond.

The hospital was built in the 1950s to replace two small and antiquated hospitals in the community: Ossining Hospital to the north and Tarrytown Hospital to the south. The land had belonged to the Phelps family, and an original mansion still known as the James House continues to be used on the hospital campus. The John D. Rockefeller estate, Kykuit, is nearby and in fact, Rockefeller money helped to build the hospital.

Over the years, Phelps administration has been alert to societal preferences in medical care and acutely aware of financial advantages. An adjacent medical building was built to house Memorial Sloan-Kettering; a twelve-seat hyperbaric chamber was installed, the largest

¹¹² R.S. Thomas, "Ivan Karamazov" from *Collected Poems 1945-1990*. (London, England: JM. Dent, 1993).

of the few in the area; a new state-of-the-art twelve-bed Critical Care Unit was opened in 2002 and a new thirty-bed Emergency Department opened in 2009. Although limited by its cramped double-occupancy patient rooms at a time when the model of excellent hospital design is private rooms, Phelps Hospital has worked hard and spent wisely to maintain a vital role in an increasingly competitive healthcare market.

Phelps is part of the Stellaris Health Network, an administrative umbrella of four Westchester County hospitals of similar size and mission that share information technology, purchasing and best practices. Stellaris staff members with similar responsibilities meet regular, as I do with the three other Stellaris chaplains.

In addition to Memorial Sloan-Kettering and Stellaris, Phelps is affiliated with Mount Sinai Health's Senior Consultation Services and with Kendal on Hudson, a continuing-care senior facility situated on Phelps land between the hospital and the river, where I propose to do one of the workshops described in this proposal.

The Office of Pastoral Care is relatively new in the hospital, established in 2007. Despite enthusiastic advocacy for professional chaplaincy long before that, the President and CEO resisted it, determined that such care be left to local clergy on a volunteer basis. His mandate when he accepted his position at Phelps in 1990 was to transform a financially troubled institution into a financially secure (not-for-profit) organization. He has been ruthlessly successful in doing that. Pastoral care was, to his thinking, just a frill until boundary issues with local clergy and the marketing advantage of professional pastoral care convinced him that it warranted at least a part-time position. I was the first chaplain hired for the position (although already employed by the hospital as the hospice chaplain) and although my work parallels my Stellaris colleagues, I am still part-time and the Office of

Pastoral Care is not a department (in contrast to the three other Stellaris chaplains who are department directors). The three other Stellaris chaplains are directors of their own departments. Educating administration and staff about the benefits of pastoral care has been, from the beginning, a major component of my work.

Employees come and go of course, but there are still a goodly number of people who came to Phelps shortly after it opened. Despite our salaries being slightly lower than our Stellaris counterparts and other area hospitals, we have job security and a congenial working atmosphere that keeps people loyal and productive. It is the only hospital I've ever visited where staff people (except for doctors) make eye contact in the halls, smile and greet not just familiar faces, but strangers. That friendliness is integral to the Phelps culture.

The Setting: The Community around the Hospital

The Phelps catchment area begins in the south on the Hudson at Dobbs Ferry and proceeds north along the river into Irvington, Tarrytown, Sleepy Hollow and Ossining (known as the “river towns”). It also includes the inland village of Briarcliff Manor and shares catchment with other hospitals in Pleasantville and Croton-on-Hudson. Populations of these villages are, as of the 2010 census:

Briarcliff Manor	7,696
Croton-on-Hudson	7,606
Dobbs Ferry	10,622
Irvington	6,631
Ossining Village	24,010
Ossining (Unincorp.)	5,514
Pleasantville	7,172

Sleepy Hollow	9,212
Tarrytown	11,090
TOTAL	89,553 ¹¹³

The total population is about the size of a small city, but without a central business district, political structure, administration, services or identity. What each of these villages and the hospital share is the proximity to the great river and its history from Washington Irving to the Rockefellers, plus the pull to New York City. No matter where one stands in any of these communities, one is aware of the location of the Hudson. There are pockets of wealth and pockets of poverty in these villages, but for the most part they span the full range of the middle class. It is common to find local residents who have lived their entire lives in the area, as did their parents before them. The racial make-up is primarily Caucasian with both African Americans and South/Central Americans as large minorities. The Latino community is the fastest growing minority and includes a significant number of well-educated Latinos who left their professional careers behind to come to America.

The number of buildings dedicated to organized religion indicates that once, these communities were deeply (or at least, conventionally) religious. Many of those buildings now struggle to keep their doors open. Among the villages named there are eight Catholic, seven Episcopal, five Presbyterian, and numerous Baptist and Evangelical churches; five synagogues; plus Ethical Society, Unitarian-Universalist, Mormon, Jehovah's Witnesses and Unification ("Moonies") congregations. A large well-educated Muslim community is seeking to build a mosque in Ossining and a Buddhist Temple is within a half-hour's drive. Not all the villages can claim diversity, but the larger area certainly can do so.

¹¹³ "Westchester County Towns and Villages Population Information,"
Delphirealty.com/commun/towns.htm.

Phelps Hospital's "Vitality Initiative"

Among the four hospitals of the Stellaris Health System, each hospital has sought, for financial reasons, to find a signature program that could then be the system-wide center for that service. As part of that focus on specialties, Phelps looked at several age groups and local populations. Because the Westchester County Medical Center, seven miles away, has a new children's hospital, pediatrics was not a good choice. Eventually, Phelps settled on Senior Health. At that time, no one else was focusing on the aging population. And because our catchment area is only 180 degrees around the hospital, thanks to the river, Phelps had to find a large population with which to specialize. Services were developed which, though not limited to elders, serve mostly the elderly: the bariatric chamber for wound healing, a pain center, a Palliative Care Team to augment the hospital's twenty-five-year-old Hospice program, in addition to the Senior Health Services department staffed by two board-certified geriatricians.

In May of this year, the first meeting was held at Phelps of The Breakfast Club, a free and healthy breakfast for seniors with speakers/teachers of their choosing, ending with some simple stretching exercises. That first meeting was devoted to polling the audience for ideas and while a good list was made, no one raised issues of spirituality, issues like the meaning of their lives or their orientation to the world. I had previously met with the Senior Vice President in charge of the program and spent a friendly but futile hour with him trying to convey my then-unformed ideas of how spirituality could be included. After the first Breakfast Club meeting, however, I met with the program director and presented her with a concrete list of possible topics: Telling Our Stories, Forgiveness Issues (of self and others), Legacies, Giving Back, and the one she liked best: "MY Funeral, MY way."

I do not plan to do my Demonstration Project in Phelps Hospital; although my work with spirituality and aging aligns so well with the hospital's initiative on aging, the administration's disinterest in pastoral care is prohibitive. Rather, I propose to do my project at both Kendal on Hudson, the senior residence adjacent to the hospital and affiliated with it, and for contrast, within the senior community at Morningside Gardens in New York City.

Kendal on Hudson

Built in 2005, this continuing care senior living facility is situated between the eastern shore of the Hudson River and Phelps Memorial Hospital Center on the hill above it. It is part of the Kendal Corporation, which has its origins in the early 1960s when the Philadelphia Society of Friends formed a Commission on Aging to address the needs of a growing senior population. The commitments and values of the Kendal Corporation reflect those of the Society of Friends in that they welcome people of all races and creeds, work to build community, and enhance life for all ages. The Kendal Corporation Commitments include the following:

WE ARE INSPIRED BY the deeply held belief and confirming observations that the later stages of life can bring new opportunities for growth and development even if emerging challenges may bring some loss of independence.

WE WILL BE SUCCESSFUL WHEN all people in our society approach the later years with an understanding of the aging process, with an appreciation of the potential for continued growth and development, and with realistic plans to address the variety of circumstances that may arise during the later period of life.

WE ENVISION THE FULL IMPACT OF OUR WORK AS the transformation of our culture's view of aging, of older persons, and of the potential for fulfillment and continuing contribution during the later stages of life.¹¹⁴

Kendal on Hudson is a 222-apartment facility, in both independent and assisted living, plus a skilled nursing section. A strong component of the residence, as with all Kendal residences, is a varied program that includes education. But as in so many such residences,

¹¹⁴ "Values and Practices"; Kendal Corporation, 2008. p. 2.

while there are cultural, social and health programs, there is very little about spirituality. When I spoke to the Health Services Administrator, she was excited about my doing my Demonstration Project at Kendal on Hudson, feeling that it would be a unique opportunity for their residents. A further conversation with the heads of the Education Committee and Faith Committee (both PhDs aware of doctoral requirements) generated even more enthusiasm and discussion of logistical options.

The Kendal community, although set in the same geographical location as Phelps Hospital, is set apart primarily by the high purchase cost of an apartment. Thus the population is affluent, primarily Caucasian, and primarily Christian and Jewish. But whether or not the residents are religious, they have chosen to live in a senior community organized around Quaker values. As such it will be fertile ground for the work I hope to do there.

Morningside Retirement and Health Services

Morningside Gardens is a middle-income cooperative housing complex in Morningside Heights, built with government assistance to house 2,000 individuals and open for occupancy in 1957. According to Ron Bruno, the Executive Director of Morningside Retirement & Health Services, Inc. (MRHS), an agency within Morningside Gardens, the complex from the beginning welcomed diversity, including mixed-race and same-sex couples, and today its cultural diversity includes a significant Asian population. MRHS was formed by volunteers within the complex to serve people over 60, but by 1986, it hired the first of its professional staff. The program, however, is still run primarily by Morningside Garden volunteers working with the professional staff.

In 1995, MRHS was designated by New York State as a NORC program, Naturally Occurring Retirement Community. As such, the complex is eligible for funds from both the state and the city for its health programs.¹¹⁵

The values of MRHS are stated as follows:

- Promoting a caring community and enriching community life;
- Preserving the dignity and human rights of older people;
- Promoting and supporting independence by actively involving individuals in managing their own care;
- Preventing isolation by keeping older residents connected to the larger Morningside Gardens community; and
- Reflecting integrity, professionalism, responsibility, warmth and respect, and a commitment to diversity.¹¹⁶

The programs that actualize these values include dance and martial arts, book discussions and language classes, a political forum, a bridge club and writing workshops, but nothing on spirituality. As with Kendal, my request to do my Demonstration Proposal at Morningside Gardens was warmly encouraged.

Morningside Gardens offers contrast to Kendal in that it is

- urban rather than suburban;
- middle class rather than affluent;
- more diverse in its population.

While I identified this spiritual problem among elders in the Sleepy Hollow area, specifically in Phelps Hospital, I believe it is a malady affecting elders across our society. By

¹¹⁵ Morningside Retirement and Health Services 2010 Annual Report, 1.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 2.

doing my project in both Kendal on Hudson and Morningside Gardens, dramatically different communities, I will have a better sense of commonality across economic, ethnic and geographical communities.

CHAPTER 2
PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGE
Your old ones shall dream dreams

CHALLENGE STATEMENT

In my work as a healthcare chaplain at Phelps Memorial Hospital Center, I provide pastoral care for adults from various (or no) faith traditions. My patients are mostly over 65, many suffering from spiritual dreariness and a sense of meaninglessness. Old spiritual habits no longer satisfy them and religious institutions offer little creative support. Without age-appropriate spiritual encouragement, many of these people will die spiritually long before physical death. My Demonstration Project proposes to address this situation by developing a program for spiritual awakening specifically designed for elders.

Dreams, as the Bible used them, were traditionally understood to be “vehicles of divine revelation, especially the dreams experienced by priests and kings.”¹¹⁷ In the book of the prophet Joel, however, that exclusivity is discarded and prophecy is opened to all those who repent and follow the Lord.

*I will pour out my spirit on all flesh:
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.
Even on the male and female slaves, in those days,
I will pour out my spirit. (Joel 2:28-29 NRSV)*

Just as this promised new democracy of prophecy among classes was significant in Joel’s era, the equality of prophecy among generations is significant in our times. Are the visions of our children valued as much as the dreams of our elderly? And if so, do the “old men” (and women) of our time believe that? Is there a question akin to the common “What

¹¹⁷ David Hill, “Dreams,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, eds. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 171.

do you want to be when you grow up?” that encourages children to dream about their future? Do we solicit and honor the reflections of the grown-up who has lived, inside or outside his or her dream, and learned from it?

The percentage of Americans 65 and older is projected to jump from roughly 12% of the American population at present to 20% by 2030, fed largely by the surge of Baby Boomers, those born between 1946 and 1964.¹¹⁸ And Boomers will likely want more attention than has been given to others who have passed through this age primarily because

They have been on a continual adventure of spiritual exploration. The result has been the eclectic mix of spiritual fashions (such as) Eastern Religion, Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism, mysticism, New Age movements, Godless worship, twelve step recovery programs, environmentalism, holistic health and ancient religions, as well as mainline churches and synagogues. Quite a mix of religious commitment and focus for this generation.¹¹⁹

On an average day in the hospital where I serve as the Coordinator of Pastoral Care, I see between ten and fifteen patients, most of them age sixty-five or older. Primarily because federal privacy laws do not allow us to contact religious institutions without a patient’s permission, I usually begin conversations with patients by asking if there is a clergyperson or a congregation they would like me to call for them. The second and even more important reason for the question is that the answer provides me with vital information as I assess the patient’s spiritual needs. Are they connected to a deity or to a faith or ethical community? Is that connection important enough in their life that they want it involved in their illness? Are they disconnected and feeling guilty about that? Are they angry? Indifferent? Their verbal and nonverbal responses to this question guide me into the visit.

¹¹⁸ www.agingstats.gov. U.S. Census Bureau projections, 2006. Baby Boomers, those born between 1946-1964, begin turning 65 in 2011.

¹¹⁹ Ron Ropp, Rev. Rel.D., “The Boomers are Coming: A New Paradigm in Ministry” (workshop, Association of Professional Chaplains, Pittsburgh, PA, March 9, 2008.

As part of my work, I train volunteer pastoral visitors who make rounds on assigned units. I respond only to requests made by patients themselves, their loved ones or the staff. Therefore, when I enter a patient's room, I know I have a role to play in that patient's life and healing process, and knowing up front what their religious situation is helps me to assess their spiritual needs.

What I find, much too often, is that people do not have a connection to any faith or ethical community, or they do not want their clergy or congregations contacted. That connection, for whatever reason, is not strong enough, not pastoral enough, to warrant its intrusion into their present vulnerability. But my invited presence means they want *something* to feed their spirits and they may have no idea what that is.

The problem as I see it is twofold:

1. In looking at spiritual development, there are characteristics, tasks and goals unique to each stage of life, including the later years of adulthood.

Developmental psychologists, spiritual writers and certain religious traditions have all identified this as a third stage of life, following childhood and adulthood.¹²⁰
2. Little attention, however, is paid to this third stage of human development in our culture. It is not difficult to find programs for elders to keep them busy, but rare to find programs to help them to grow spiritually. There are books aplenty for one to read in solitude and perhaps find useful, but little to help a

¹²⁰ Anti-aging-articles.com, "Elderhood: What Comes After Adulthood." The premise of this site is that while much is written about "aging" and "old age" as chronological stages, these are not stages of human development.

mature adult grow in community. And I do not believe we are meant to grow in isolation.

The writer William H. Thomas, M.D., a geriatrician, in his book *What Are Old People For*,¹²¹ explains why he believes the word “senescence” needs to be reclaimed from those who would use it only to describe decline.

Senescence, like adolescence, is a time of transition. It is a letting go of something comfortable and familiar (in this case the practices of adulthood) and a reaching out for something new and different. There is no biological trigger for this transition; it is a function of culture and shared expectations. It is the beginning of ripening, just as adolescence is the beginning of maturation.¹²²

But who will support this? Congregations are overwhelmingly preoccupied with the demographics of the institution these days. They focus on children and youth because these are the future of the institution, because a welcome for children brings in their parents’ money to pay bills, and because when families are filling the seats, the institution can feel it is fulfilling its mission. I hear pastors of aging congregations bemoan the fact that their congregations are “grey” or “dying,” but they do not stop to consider that they may have the power to bring life to their congregation by ministering to those same grey-haired people whose majority seems so depressing . . . and not just by providing pastoral care, but by encouraging spiritual revitalization, creativity and wisdom-making among these mature adults.

The population that I am focusing on has been underserved for many years, but with the expansion of their ranks by Baby Boomers, I believe there will be more demand for

¹²¹ William H. Thomas, *What are Old People For: How Elders Will Save the World*. (Acton, MA: VanderWyk & Burnham, 2004), 126.

¹²² Ibid., 126.

spiritual attention. I hope eventually to provide a readily-available process that any group, religious or not, can use. For this very reason, my program will not be religion-specific.

In my Demonstration Project, I plan to

1. research what others in the field of spirituality and aging have written; look at what various religious traditions say about aging, if anything; and what developmental experts have said about spirituality in mature adults, if anything (Research Question #2);
2. raise awareness of the need for spiritual exploration and development among adults 65 and over and recruit elders who are willing to meet in a group for six weekly two-hour sessions, work independently outside of the meetings, help me to evaluate their experience and creatively suggest ways to develop the program. The participants will be both evaluators and creative developers of so that the participants are both evaluators and co-creators of the eventual program product. (Goal #1);
3. develop a program/curriculum for use by a group of elders to help them reflect on their spiritual journeys and yearnings and use it through the six-week workshop. It will make heavy use of narrative because I believe that in the stories we read, appropriate, live through and retell, we learn everything we need to know about our spiritual lives (Goal #2, Research Question #3);
4. Evaluate the outcomes of the group process and my own deeper insight into the problem and develop a curriculum for a program that is easily accessible to elders and to religious or community groups.

My plan is that the group will be self-selecting, recruited within each of the two settings, where I will first do an awareness-raising presentation and then conduct a workshop.

I will look for people who not only seek to deepen their own spiritual lives, but who are willing to creatively and intellectually participate in this project.

My vision is that this will help to raise awareness of the need for spiritual encouragement for elders, the importance of the resource they could provide and the waste of potential wisdom if this idea is not pursued. My hope is that the end product of this project, an easily accessed curriculum that elders can use among themselves, will help to address these problems.

My Site Team, two of whom are over 65, are very engaged with this challenge. They have suggested realistic limits, changes in vocabulary, and resources to pursue, and they stand ready to be supportive as I go forward. I have a clinical psychologist and a Marriage and Family Therapist on my team to help not only with competencies but also with evaluations. Another member of the team is a spiritual director with skills that will keep me focused on spirituality. And each member of the team is connected to a network of other people who can be resources.

CHAPTER 3
PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION
By their deeds they shall be known

Goal #1: Raise awareness with elders in two senior facilities about the unique spiritual needs and gifts of elders.

Strategy 1: Presentation to residents at Kendal on Hudson.

Strategy 2: Presentation to elderly residents at Morningside Gardens, through Morningside Gardens Retirement Services.

Evaluation: Using the answers from pre- and post-presentation written questionnaires, from at least 75% of participants, determine what people knew before and what they learned from my presentation.

Goal #2: From those attending the initial presentation, form two groups of twelve people willing to engage in work on their spiritual lives and in the process, develop a model for others to use.

Strategy 1: Interview and select people interested in participating in a workshop.
Distribute pre-workshop evaluations to participants.

Strategy 2: Design a workshop, based on research and response from presentation questionnaires.

Strategy 3: Conduct a six-week workshop at Kendal on Hudson.

Strategy 4: Conduct a concurrent six-week workshop at Morningside Gardens.

Strategy 5: Conduct in-depth interviews with selected participants.

Evaluation: Complete both workshops with at least 50% of the initial participants. My hypothesis is that post-workshop evaluations will demonstrate deepened self-awareness and appreciation for participants' continuing spiritual journey.

Goal #3: Develop a curriculum from Goals 1 and 2 for eventual use by groups of elders.

Strategy 1: Analyze information gleaned from presentation questionnaires, workshop experience and evaluations, and in-depth interviews.

Strategy 2: Prepare a curriculum that can be used by groups of elders.

Evaluation: Completion of curriculum and completion of demonstration project by September 1, 2012.

CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH QUESTIONS
Who do they say we are?

BIBLICAL

Using the scriptural record of Rebecca and Mary Magdalene, explore the biblical understanding of legacy: How does one's life experience influence those who come later?

Among the cast of thousands in the Bible whose stories make up The Story by which we live, only certain people are named. The legacies of some of them are obvious: Adam and Eve speak to our human condition; Abraham and Sarah to the integration of obedience and adventure; Moses, David and Solomon to management styles. But what about the women? Their legacies are less obvious; their ethical wills are not written into the narrative as are Jacob's, or Elijah's, or David's, or even Jesus's. As such, however, their legacies may be more instructive to those of us who live more ordinary, less examined lives.

I will explore the concept of legacy in the Bible using Rebecca in the Hebrew scriptures and Mary Magdalene in the Greek scriptures to understand the nature of legacy, how it accords with our relationship with God, and finally, how pieces of these two women's stories have been and may be appropriated into our own, twenty-first century stories.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

What have experts said, both scientific and spiritual, about the needs and potential for spiritual development in mature adults, particularly those over sixty-five?

The basis of my Demonstration Project will be to educate adults over 65 about their unique needs and potential. This necessitates both defining “spirituality” and investigating the confluence of human development and spiritual growth by reading and learning from experts like Erik Erikson and Joan Erikson, Carl Jung, James Fowler, Ken Wilbur, Joan Chittister and Dan McAdams. I will also explore ancient religious/philosophical systems such as Hinduism, Judaism and Confucianism to study their understanding of healthy spiritual maturity.

CULTURAL

Using contemporary fiction, film and poetry, plus narrative theory, explore how we use story, our own and those stories told by others, to gain insight into our spiritual journey.

Narrative, our stories, feeds the work of Wisdom-Making. This will be the crux of my Demonstration Project. This question will be an exploration of what narrative is, how it functions in our lives, how we translate our experience into our stories, and how we use pieces of other stories to both inspire and express our own stories.

In the course of answering these questions, I will explore literature (fiction, film and poetry) that shows us who we are as humans. Literature is rich in examples from the tragedies of Shakespeare’s King Lear and his modern counterpart, Larry Cook in Jane Smiley’s *A Thousand Acres*, to Melville’s Captain Ahab (*Moby Dick*) and Arthur Miller’s Willy Loman (*Death of a Salesman*). Miller’s writings are especially fertile studies of the

human condition, especially *Incident at Vichy* and the ultimate terror of living a disingenuous life. Popular films have also demonstrated society's yearning to comprehend this thing called "aging." Relatively recent examples include "The Bucket List," "On Golden Pond" and "Driving Miss Daisy." Less obvious examples include "Crazy Heart" (self-forgiveness) and "Midnight in Paris" (fantasy and regret). And of course, poets express our deepest melancholy, poets like T.S. Eliot, R.S. Thomas, May Sarton and Robert Frost.

In 1983 I went to Yale Divinity School and enrolled in the Religion and the Arts Program, to focus on Christianity and literature. Those studies were somewhat side-tracked when I transferred to the Master of Divinity program to explore and answer a call to ordination. Finally, the switches have been thrown and that side tracked interest in spirituality/religion and the arts is now back on the main track as I pursue again this lifelong interest in The Story and Our Stories.

CHAPTER 5
EVALUATION PROCESS
For now we see in a mirror, brightly

A basic premise of this project is that the elders involved already have the threads at hand to weave wisdom: a tapestry of their knowledge, experience and spiritual development. The project will explore ways to help them access these threads, and then guide them into wisdom-making.

This project will employ qualitative research methods. I will be the lead evaluator, but I see this being a collaborative process, with the men and women in the workshops evaluating as we progress, in addition to more detailed pre- and post-evaluations. I will consult with the Site Team, especially those members experienced in evaluation processes, as I prepare the questionnaires and evaluations.

**1. PRE- AND POST-QUESTIONNAIRS AT AWARENESS-RAISING
PRESENTATION**

At the presentations I make at both senior facilities, I will ask people to fill out questionnaires (anonymously) that ask them to describe their level of spiritual satisfaction: Do they attend to their spiritual lives? Do they have support for spiritual growth? Can they identify spiritual issues that please them or perplex them? What do they want and cannot find? At the end of the presentation, I will ask them to complete the questionnaire, describing what new information or insight they acquired. My goal is to have at least 50% of attendees return questionnaires to me.

2. PRE- AND POST-EVALUATIONS BY THOSE WHO PARTICIPATE IN THE WORKSHOPS

After the participants are chosen for the workshops, they will be asked to fill in a detailed questionnaire describing their spiritual life, its disappointments and delights, their hopes for the workshop and for their own spiritual growth.

At the end of the workshop, they will again be asked to address these issues in writing, indicating not only what did or did not work in the workshop, but what wisdom they have uncovered in the process.

A major component of the process is story-telling. My hope is that as people tell their stories, they will uncover those threads they never noticed before. I do not see myself “teaching” these people, but giving them the means to explore where they have been and through that, where their deepest yearnings can lead them forward. The evaluations will be as much a reflection to them as it will be information for me.

3. ON-GOING ASSESSMENT OF THE WORKSHOPS

As we progress through each session, I will ask for evaluation of that particular session. This will provide data for me as I do Goal #3, preparing the curriculum. This piece of the evaluation process will be collaborative and will also, I hope, give the participants the confidence to duplicate this workshop at a future time. One of my competencies to develop is to understand small group process, which will assist me in this phase of the project.

4. INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE WORKSHOPS

My own skill set is particularly suited to one-to-one conversation. Encouraging people’s stories is at the heart of my work as a healthcare chaplain. I will conduct in-depth interviews with selected individuals at the end of the workshop to:

- Evaluate how well the workshop experience deepened their personal insight into their spiritual life;
- Evaluate whether the individuals need further support. Did the workshop go far enough? Was it a first step that needs follow-up?
- Evaluate the mechanics of the workshop: what worked and what could have been improved?

5. FINAL EVALUATIONS

Using the data collected from the presentation questionnaires, the on-going workshop assessments, the pre/post workshop evaluations and the individual interviews, I hope to evaluate the following:

- How much did the elders involved understand about their spiritual needs and potential before my presentation?
- Was the initial presentation helpful to them, somewhat interesting or simply boring?
- For those who participated in the workshops, were they able to deepen their spiritual lives in ways that were acceptable and enriching to them?
- Did the mechanics of the workshop design operate well?
- What follow-up do the participants need, if any, to continue their spiritual growth?
- What else is needed, if anything, to support these elders in facilitating similar groups?

CHAPTER 6
MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES
Blessed are the imperfections, for they shall challenge us

The Process

The members of the Site Team have been actively engaged in helping me to assess my competencies and what follows is our mutually agreed-upon conclusions. My Site Team is notably diverse (Catholic, Episcopal, Congregational, Jewish and Naturalist/Humanist) and the members are particularly qualified to assess the multi-faith dimensions of the competencies. The members of my Site Team are:

Robert J. Berson, PhD

Sherrie Dulworth, RN

Sister Gloria Jean Henchy, CDP, BCC

Amy Hendler, RD

Jamie Pfeiffer, MFT

After the Site Team Orientation, we met as a team on four occasions, worked online, and had several one-on-one meetings.

March 12, 2011: Introduction to the assessment process; organizing Site Team tasks.

April 2, 2011: Assessment of the competencies as they apply to me.

May 27 2011: Completion of competency assessment.

Sherrie Dulworth then compiled our assessments and she and I worked online to complete the assessments and add strategies and evaluations to those competencies that I will develop.

June 11, 2011: The Site Team met to refine and approve the final competencies report, as well as to discuss drafts of research questions.

Summer 2011: Consultations with individual members of Site Team, according to their expertise.

The Assessments

1. Knowledge and appreciation of one's own faith tradition. Continue: Carole encourages other Christians to grow by educating them about their faith, preaching well in Christian settings, and by preparing other Christians for life passages (baptism, confirmation, marriage). She co-facilitates a monthly women's interfaith discussion group in which she presents the Christian perspective on topics under discussion. This usually requires that she present the perspective of *many* denominations rather than a *single* Christian perspective. *Candidate intends to continue this in both Christian settings and as the Christian voice in multi-faith settings.*

2. Knowledge and appreciation of the values of other faith traditions. Continue: Carole's professional work in the multi-faith setting of a hospital, where knowledge of faith traditions other than her own is required, is an on-going learning experience. She has some expertise in Judaism, which was her seminary concentration, and with participation in the monthly women's interfaith discussion group, she has deepened her knowledge of Islam. She also participates in, and learns from the two multi-faith clergy groups she meets with in the community. In the Clinical Pastoral Training (CPT) program she supervises at Phelps Memorial Hospital Center, she encourages and challenges people to integrate their own faith and experience into the material presented. *Candidate will continue in both the learning and supporting of other spiritual traditions as a natural part of her work and personal leanings.*

3. ***Ability to engage productively in dialogue. Continue:*** Again, in multi-faith settings, Carole is able to pose questions to others about their traditions and answer their questions about Christianity. In CPT and in her chaplaincy work, she is able to “cross borders” into other belief systems without erasing the boundaries between those and her own belief system. She has also studied the modern definition of “Pluralism” which emphasizes *respectful* “Dialogue” as the main vehicle of multi-faith experiences. *Candidate will continue to engage productively in multi-faith dialogue.*
4. ***Ability to interpret sacred texts. Continue:*** We assume this refers specifically to the Holy Bible, Carole’s own sacred text. She has a long experience of preaching, teaching and writing about biblical themes. The statement “with sensitivity to the texts and identities of others” was confusing to the Site Team and we did not feel that she could be expected to *interpret* other sacred texts with any degree of expertise. Carole can present the Bible to people from non-Christian traditions, but she would not be likely to *proclaim* it in a multi-faith setting. *The Candidate will continue to interpret the Bible within her own faith tradition and when asked, for other spiritual traditions. She will also continue to respect all other sacred scriptures and learn from them.*
5. ***Ability as worship leader. Continue:*** Again, this question seems designed more for the Congregational setting, and in such a setting, Carole has demonstrated excellent liturgical abilities. In a multi-faith setting, Carole is able to participate, acting out of the *philosophy and theology* of her own faith, in ways that would be respectful and spiritually nourishing for everyone involved. The larger question remains, however, as to whether there actually can be “multi-faith worship.” *The Candidate will*

continue as a worship leader within her own faith tradition and continue to explore with others whether a different paradigm for multi-faith “worship” is possible.

6. ***Facilitating transformation. Continue:*** Carole does this through pastoral care in her ministry. She is able to assess what people need spiritually and to help them take steps toward spiritual transformation. Carole states that she was prompted to undertake this academic project through seeing that congregations, primarily Christian and Jewish, do not minister sufficiently to mature healthy adults. Families, children and youth, even the very elderly are well attended, but those who are at or near retirement and still healthy are usually offered little more than games or field trips. Carole believes passionately that there is a unique spirituality in people of this age, who have fuller experience and the wisdom gained from it. *The Candidate will continue to encourage questioning and spiritual exploration in her ministry that may, in fact, lead to transformation.*
7. ***Ability as multi-faith leader. Develop:*** The Site Team spent a significant amount of time discussing this and believes that this is one of the foci of Carole’s Demonstration Project. While she trains pastoral visitors, helps them to flourish in that calling, listens well, responds well and loves sharing resources, she feels she does *not* delegate well, thereby reducing her effectiveness. By “delegate” we do not mean assigning tasks for others to complete, but sharing responsibilities with others so that all may be invested in the outcome. *The Candidate wants to learn to delegate responsibility to capable people in a more collegial and effective way.*
8. ***Ability to serve as a multi-faith religious educator. Continue:*** Carole has received excellent feedback from those who have learned from her in her pastoral work,

speaking engagements and social encounters. While she is a Christian, she has a deep understanding of Judaism and increasingly of Islam and is able to open those traditions to other Christians, not as an apologist for other faiths, but as one who can capably facilitate dialogue. *Candidate will continue her work as a multi-faith religious educator and facilitator of dialogue.*

9. Ability as counselor in a multi-faith context. Continue: Carole feels that this is at the heart of what she does as a professional chaplain and that she is well-trained, experienced and continues her education as part of her board certification. *The Candidate will continue in her ministry as a pastoral caregiver and counselor in a multi-faith setting.*

10. Spiritual Leader. Develop: Carole needs to be more diligent in her own spiritual discipline in order to have more insight into the spiritual needs of other people. She will devote one of her research questions to understanding spirituality through the life stages, and as a competency, *the Candidate will seek and try different spiritual experiences to deepen her own spiritual life.*

11. Witness. Continue: Carole is a strong witness to her faith values, which include opening other spiritual traditions to individuals and groups of peoples, including a wide range of age, gender, race, religious and ethnic diversities, through both her words and deeds, professional and non-professional. She is concerned to discover where, within her own Christian tradition, education about pluralism is possible. *The Candidate will continue to effectively witness in a multi-faith context.*

12. Administrator. Develop: While she does considerable administrative work as Coordinator of Pastoral Care at the hospital, Carole would benefit by learning to be

more goal-oriented rather than reactive. *The Candidate will devote attention to evidence-based procedures in healthcare, as well as to incorporating goal-setting into her CPT program.*

13. Organizer. Develop: The small group process is one that Carole has experienced and facilitated, but one in which she still lacks a comfort level. Further understanding of small-group process will be beneficial for her work and certainly, for her Demonstration Project. *The Candidate will develop an understanding of small group leadership dynamics and process development.*

14. Professional. Continue: Carole's practice as a professional healthcare chaplain is guided by the Best Practices of the Professional Chaplain in an Acute Healthcare Facility, and by the Ethical Standards for Professional Healthcare Chaplains, both set forth by the Association of Professional Chaplains, by which she is Board Certified. She is also endorsed as priest and professional healthcare chaplain by the bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of New York. *The Candidate will continue to have her practice guided by these professional and ecclesiastical standards and others that may apply to future work.*

COMPETENCIES TO DEVELOP-STRATEGIES AND EVALUATIONS

1. Ability as multi-faith leader (#7)

The Candidate wants to learn to delegate responsibility to capable people in a more collegial and effective way.

Strategies:

- A. Request assistance from Site Team member Sherrie Dulworth to help improve delegation skills.
- B. Identify two professionals with whom she works who delegate effectively (*not* in a managerial role, but with peers). Observe their style and discuss their methods with them.
- C. Discuss ways to delegate within professional chaplaincy with Certification Peer Review Committee.

Evaluation:

- A. Request feedback from Sherrie Dulworth, and from Sister Gloria Jean Henchy, who will participate in the Certification Peer Review Committee.
- B. Write about and discuss with Site Team:
 - What was learned from B and C above;
 - Whether or not the information learned was integrated into her working style.

2. Spiritual Leader (#10)

The Candidate will seek and try different spiritual experiences to deepen her own spiritual life and as a model for those who participate in her Demonstration Project.

Strategies:

- A. Request assistance from Site Team member, Sister Gloria Jean Henchy to help identify ways to creatively expand her own spiritual life.
- B. Meet with the Rev. Dr. Mary Lou Howson, whose Doctor of Ministry project focused on Teresa of Avila, to learn more about how Teresa understood spirituality and aging
- C. Attend Christian worship at two places whose worship differs from her own tradition: Antioch Baptist Church in Bedford Hills and a Quaker meeting in Mt. Kisco.
- D. Set aside retreat time at Holy Cross Monastery and meet there with a spiritual director.

Evaluation:

- A. Keep a journal of B, C and D above.
- B. Write a new Rule of Life (last done 21 years ago).
- C. Request feedback from Sister Gloria Jean as this progresses.
- D. Write about this process and elicit feedback from the Site Team.

3. Administrator (#12)

In order to practice being more goal-oriented rather than reactive, the Candidate will study evidence-based procedures in healthcare.

Strategies:

- A. Request assistance from Site Team member Amy Hendler to identify ways to be more focused on goals in pastoral ministry, focusing on “evidence-based chaplaincy.”
- B. Read literature on evidence-based pastoral care, and discuss with other professional chaplains who use it, particularly the Rev. Jay Risk, BCC in Chicago.
- C. Discuss evidence-based chaplaincy with her Certification Peer Review Committee and Stellaris Chaplains.

- D. Improve goal-setting (by participants) in Clinical Pastoral Training program.
- E. Read material by Paul Wachtel on problems with the evidence-based treatment approach in mental health.

Evaluation:

- A. Evaluate in writing what was learned about evidence-based chaplaincy and whether or not it proves useful for my pastoral care work.
- B. Evaluate with CPT students the value of goal-setting.
- C. Write about goal-setting and elicit feedback from Site Team.

4. (#13) Organizer.

The Candidate will deepen her understanding of small group leadership dynamics and process development and become more comfortable using it both as CPT supervisor and in her Demonstration Project.

Strategies:

- A. Request assistance from Site Team members Bob Berson and Jamie Pfeiffer, both of whom have professional experience with small group process.
- B. From their recommendations and other sources, choose two books and two articles to read.
- C. Apply what is learned to next class of Clinical Pastoral Training.

Evaluation:

- A. From the reading and experience, raise five relevant questions about small group process.
- B. Meet with Bob Berson and Jamie Pfeiffer to discuss questions.
- C. Write a self-evaluation and elicit feedback from the Site Team.

APPENDIX 1 - TIMELINE

DUE DATE	ACTION	NEED TO COMPLETE	PERSON RESPONSIBLE
12/1/11	Site Team Meeting to discuss Proposal	Convene Team; complete Proposal	CJ
12/15/11	Submit Proposal	Rewriting as necessary	CJ with Dr. Lundy and Site Team
12/15/11	Advisor engaged	Letter and bio submitted	CJ
1/1/12	Research completed for Research Question #1	Do research	CJ
1/1/12	Read books on research	Reading	CJ
1/1/12	Proposal Approved	--	NYTS
1/1/12	Meeting with Advisor via Skype	Summary of work to date	CJ/Advisor
1/1/12	Research Question #1 completed; paper submitted to D.12 Irvin	Research and write on biblical legacy	CJ
1/1/12	Final arrangements made with Kendal	Arrange for rooms, coffee, film showings	CJ/head of Spirituality Committee
1/1/12	Final arrangements made with MGRS	Arrange for rooms, coffee, film showings	CJ/Ron Bruno
1/1/12	Competency #1 completed	Meetings with colleagues, S. Dulworth	CJ
1/15/12	Meeting with Advisor via Skype	Summary of Project progress	CJ/Advisor
2/1/12	Goal 1, Strategies 1 and 2 completed	Research and preparation of introductory presentation	CJ
2/1/12	Competency #2 completed	Complete strategies; meet with GJ	CJ

		Henchy	
2/1/12	Site Team Meeting	Review competencies and Project progress	CJ
2/15/12	Meeting with Advisor via Skype	Summary of Project progress	CJ/Advisor
3/1/12	Goal 2, Strategy 2 completed	Design workshop; continue research	CJ
3/15/12	Meeting with Advisor via Skype	Summary of Project progress	CJ/Advisor
4/1/12	Competency #4 completed	Strategies done; meet with B. Berson and J. Pfeiffer	CJ
4/1/12	Meeting with Advisor via Skype	Summary of Project progress	CJ/Advisor
4/15/12	Meeting with Advisor via Skype	Summary of Project progress	CJ/Advisor
5/1/12	Meeting with Advisor via Skype	Summary of Project progress	CJ/Advisor
5/1/12	Competency #3 completed	Strategies done; meet with A. Hendler	CJ
5/1/12	Site Team Meeting	Discuss All Competencies	CJ/Site Team
5/15/12	Goal 2, Strategies 3 and 4 completed	Conduct two workshops	CJ and workshop participants
5/15/12	Meeting with Advisor via Skype	Summary of Project progress	CJ/Advisor
6/1/12	Meeting with Advisor via Skype	Summary of Project progress	CJ/Advisor
6/15/12	Goal 2, Strategy 5	Conduct in-depth interviews with selected workshop participants	CJ and interviewees.
7/1/12	Meeting with Advisor via Skype	Discussion of Project, writing	CJ/Advisor
8/1/12	Goal 3, Strategy 1	Organize and analyze data	CJ
8/1/12	Meeting with Advisor via Skype	Thesis	CJ/Advisor
9/1/12	Goal 3, Strategy 2	Complete curriculum	CJ
9/1/12	Meeting with Advisor via Skype	Discuss curriculum and thesis	CJ/Advisor
10/1/12	Submit report of Demonstration	Writing time	CJ

	Project		
10/1/12	Meeting with Advisor via Skype	Discussion of thesis	CJ/Advisor
1/1/13	Submit final thesis	Analyze data; write paper	CJ
4/13	Oral presentation of Final Project	Necessary preparation	CJ
5/13	GRADUATION!	Buy doctoral robe to share with daughter	CJ

APPENDIX 2 - BUDGET

DATE	ACTION	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	COST	FUNDING
12/15/11	Printing of Proposal	CJ	\$100	CJ
2/30/12	Printing of curriculum for workshops	CJ	\$200	CJ
Spring 2012	Gas/tolls for Travel to NYC	CJ	\$200	CJ
5/30/12	Celebratory meal after workshops	CJ	Cost depends on numbers	CJ – will negotiate for cost sharing with participants and facilities
12/15/12	Editing of Thesis	P. Culbertson	\$1,000	CJ

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Co-worker at Phelps Hospital; resource.

APPENDIX B

INITIAL PRESENTATION TO KENDAL AND MORNINGSIDE GARDENS

“Wisdom Making: A Spiritual Job Description for Elders”

Presentation at Kendal on Hudson - January 16, 2012

Morningside Gardens – February 8, 2012

INTRODUCTION: HOW I CAME TO BE DOING THIS

I am so delighted to be here tonight. Not only are you a very appealing audience, but this marks the beginning of a project I’ve been working on for over a year and I hope I’ll get you caught up in my excitement about it. The area I’m studying for my doctoral work at New York Theological Seminary is Spirituality and Aging. I chose to work in this area because from what I’ve seen and experienced myself, the spiritual needs and gifts of those of us in our mature years are given very little attention. We elders, our religious institutions assume, are content to do things the way we’ve always done them. I don’t think that serves us well. I believe, increasingly enthusiastically, that the needs of those of us over 65 are unique, and the gifts we can offer to others incredibly useful – and unused.

RELIGION vs. SPIRITUALITY

Let me say up front that I’m not here to talk about religion, but about spirituality – and there is a big difference. My doctoral work, in fact, focuses on human spirituality across cultures, across religious lines, across racial lines. (I hope to be doing this same project at Morningside Gardens in Manhattan, where I’ll work with African-Americans and Asians, as well as Caucasians.) Religion is about ‘belonging, belief and behavior.’ Spirituality is more than that, although it can and often does, include a religious or ethical system.

So what I’d like to talk to you about and then have you talk to me about, is this:

- What *is* Spirituality?
- What brought me to delve into this subject? (my experience, patients, Hinduism);
- My thoughts, so far, about Aging and Spirituality;

- How I'd like to pursue it.

WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY?

So, first: What is Spirituality? My own definition is very basic: Spirituality is that part of us that is aware that we are part of something much greater than ourselves. A humanist may call it simply humankind or the world and its creatures. A Jew, a Christian or a Muslim may understand it as the world God created, A Hindu understands him/her self as part of the cosmos. However we describe it, we know we are not the Center of All Things. And the part of us that knows that and *feels* that is the human spirit. It soars in the presence of beauty and suffers in the presence of ugliness. It is beyond our cognitive abilities, although lots of dogma has been attached to it. Often, it is unexplainable.

When people ask me what I do in the hospital, I tell them that my task is to point to the Holy—the Other, however the patient understands the Other—and then get out of the way.

Others have described Spirituality in different words:

- “Spirituality is the glasses through which one engages the world.” (Donald Koepke, healthcare chaplain, in an APC workshop on Spirituality and dementia)
- And, “Spirituality is *lived* belief, not just *cognitive* belief.” (Donald Koepke)
- “Spirituality is the way in which a person understands and lives life in view of her or his ultimate meaning, beliefs and values.” (James Fowler, *Stages of Life*, 1980s)
- “Spirituality means not just one compartment of life, but the deepest dimension of all life. The spiritual is the ultimate ground of all our questions, hopes, fears and loves.” (Kathleen Fischer, *Winter Grace*, 1998)

- Robert C. Atchley, who has written most prolifically about spirituality and aging, states that “Some spiritual experiences consist mainly of wonder and feelings of connection, others are primarily experiences of compassion, and others are mainly of silence, space and intangibility.” (*Spirituality and Aging*, 22)
- Atchley also says, and this is perhaps most definitive: “The essence of fully developed spirituality is an intense aliveness and deep sense of understanding that one intuitively comprehends as having come from a direct, internal link with that mysterious principle that connects all aspects of the universe. As fully awakened spiritual beings, we feel our interconnectedness.” (*Spirituality and Aging*, 13)

I think I like that last one even better than the one I’ve been using.

WHAT BROUGHT ME TO DELVE INTO THIS SUBJECT?

Three things:

1. my own experience,
2. my experience with patients,
3. a long-ago encounter with Hinduism.

MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

My own spiritual journey began in the Roman Catholic Church, where I stayed for 40 years. I grew up in an Italian Catholic home, complete with statues, candles, novenas and the marvelous feast days that only Italians in Brooklyn could produce. For 40 years, with a break for early-adult doubt, I was a communicant and eventually, a teacher, preacher and university chaplain right up to the day I was received into the Episcopal Church. It was a call to priesthood that forced me to seek a religious home where I could not only pursue that call, but find the teachings more agreeable to me as a thinking woman. Four years after I became

an Episcopalian, I was ordained a deacon, and a year later, a priest. I remember every detail of the day I was ordained as well as I remember the details of my wedding day. My husband and I were living in Danbury, CT and I was serving as assistant to the rector in a parish in Greenwich. I assisted at the 8 o'clock service that morning – it was a Sunday – then went home to rest before coming back for the 5 o'clock ordination service. I had been waiting for this day for years. Every time I attended worship, I could feel myself physically leaning toward the altar where I knew, I *knew*, I belonged. The Hound of Heaven had been at my heels and I had no choice but to follow. I knew myself as a priest even before the bishop laid hands on my head.

But for the last several years, I've wondered where that wonder went off to. I am still a priest and sacramentalist in my chosen church home, but I miss that deeply satisfying experience of being at the altar and knowing I am where I belong. Twenty years isn't such a long time by the time you cross 65, so why do I find myself seeking something more organic to my life when just two decades ago I knew I'd found the place I'd sought for so long? Why is doing what I've always done not enough any more?

MY EXPERIENCE AT PHELPS

The second influence is my work as Chaplain of Phelps Hospital. The majority of patients admitted, and thus, the majority of people I see, are over 65. Some contact their own clergy when they come into the hospital; most do not. Most, in fact, either do not *want* their clergy involved or have no one to call. They may have listed themselves as Catholic or Lutheran or Jewish or Presbyterian, but they really have no affiliation. And without that connection to a religious institution, they assume their spiritual life has simply fallen dormant. I see so much spiritual dreariness or weariness among the people I visit. And that,

combined with my personal awareness of needing something different as I age, drew me to look at this subject more closely. So I am now a candidate for a Doctor of Ministry at New York Theological Seminary, where I studying among Hindus and Jews and Christians and Unitarian-Universalists and Buddhists. Study – *any* kind of study - on the doctoral level was always on my Bucket List, but there had never been an area I wanted to pursue that deeply. Until now.

HINDUISM

And the third influence that has stayed with me since I first studied Hinduism, years ago, is the Four Stages of Life, of *Ashrama*, in Hindu tradition. These are ideally the stages of a man's life. (Woman may accompany the man as his wife in the second and third stages.)

1. *Brah-mach-ar-ya* is the student. A boy-child is taught all he must know in order to be a householder and to carry his responsibility to maintain the balance of the universe.
2. *Gri-has-tha* is the stage of the Householder. This stage often begins with marriage, after which the man and woman maintain their home, including home shrines and worship, raise children, participate in their community and in their professions. This stage is especially important because the Householder must support people in all the other stages.
3. When a couple's youngest child becomes a Householder, the man and his wife enter the third stage of life, that of *Vana-pras-tha*. This is roughly comparable to our traditional retirement. Their religious and secular responsibilities are considerably lightened and they are free to contemplate their life and their coming death and rebirth. He, or they, are sometimes

called the Forest people because they are free to go off into the forest to ponder, to meditate.

4. And the fourth stage, *Sann-ya-sa*, is that of the ascetic, who focuses on rejecting life and all its attachments. The ritual that begins this stage, which can begin at any time, includes burning the Vedas, the ancient holy texts. Even religion is abandoned as one concentrates on gaining the true wisdom of the cosmos and relinquishing all that holds him to this world, which will eventually, when perfected, end the cycle of rebirths.

It is the third stage that, I think, has much to teach us. Obviously, none of us has gone off into the forest, but we no longer carry the burdens of the Householder. We are free to contemplate, to involve ourselves in that which is most satisfying to us. Yes, we're closer to death than we used to be, but there is life left to live and the spirit needs to be nurtured. Unlike the Hindus, we are contemplating not the end of this life, but the entirety of it.

MY THOUGHTS, SO FAR

Perhaps the most important thing I want to say tonight is that I've come to believe that WE have unique spiritual needs and gifts – that the ideas and practices of spirituality that have served us all our lives may need something more, something different at this stage of our lives. I am most definitely *not* dealing with end-of-life issues. But reality is that we have more years behind us than ahead of us, so what is the fullness of life for us NOW. *That* is what I want to explore.

And there are hints that the unique spiritual nature of society's elders are beginning to be noticed by the secular society. It probably has something to do with the first of the Baby

Boomers turning 65 during 2011 but if The New York Times can be seen as a harbinger of our society, here are some of the headlines during 2011:

- “The Aging of America, As Opportunity” (5/1/11)
- “Turn 70. Act Your Grandchild’s Age” (7/11/11)
- “The Financial Time Bomb of Longer Lives” (10.17/11)
- “The Life Reports II: Positive Lessons From the Senior Set” (11/29/12)

This year:

- “The Middle of the Journey” (about the time between 40 and dementia” (1/15/12)
David Brooks
- “Advice from Life’s Graying Edge on Finishing with No Regrets” (1/10/12) Jane Brody

Even Wells-Fargo ran an ad last May promising they would be “With you when it’s time to transition more than wealth.”

All of that attention is important, but I think we need more.

WHAT ARE THE UNIQUE SPIRITUAL NEEDS OF AN ELDER?

I think we need to look back and reconcile where we need to, then taking all that we’ve learned and become, shape it into wisdom we can access and articulate in the present, then decide what to do with our wisdom, how to give it back. I think we should also look ahead to how we want to die and what we believe will happen, if anything, after death – but as I said, there is much said and written about end-of-life and that is not where I am focusing right now.

ONE: SELF-FORGIVENESS

By the time we get to our age, we've made whole heap of choices in our lives – most of them good choices, but every one of us has a list of choices we wish we'd made differently.

There are two poems that speak to that issue of regret or gratefulness for the choices we've made. One of them is Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poignant poem, "Maud Muller"

MAUD Muller, on a summer's day,
Raked the meadow sweet with hay.

Beneath her torn hat glowed the wealth
Of simple beauty and rustic health.

Singing, she wrought, and her merry glee
The mock-bird echoed from his tree.

But when she glanced to the far-off town,
White from its hill-slope looking down,

The sweet song died, and a vague unrest
And a nameless longing filled her breast,—

A wish that she hardly dared to own,
For something better than she had known.

The Judge rode slowly down the lane,
Smoothing his horse's chestnut mane.

He drew his bridle in the shade
Of the apple-trees to greet the maid,

And ask a draught from the spring that flowed
Through the meadow across the road.

She stooped where the cool spring bubbled up,
And filled for him her small tin cup,

And blushed as she gave it, looking down
On her feet so bare, and her tattered gown.

"Thanks!" said the Judge; "a sweeter draught
From a fairer hand was never quaffed."

He spoke of the grass and flowers and trees,
Of the singing birds and the humming bees;

Then talked of the haying, and wondered whether
The cloud in the west would bring foul weather.

And Maud forgot her brier-torn gown
And her graceful ankles bare and brown;

And listened, while a pleased surprise
Looked from her long-lashed hazel eyes.

At last, like one who for delay
Seeks a vain excuse, he rode away.

Maud Muller looked and sighed: "Ah me!
That I the Judge's bride might be!"

"He would dress me up in silks so fine,
And praise and toast me at his wine.

"My father should wear a broadcloth coat;
My brother should sail a painted boat.

"I'd dress my mother so grand and gay,
And the baby should have a new toy each day.

"And I'd feed the hungry and clothe the poor,
And all should bless me who left our door."

The Judge looked back as he climbed the hill,
And saw Maud Muller standing still.

"A form more fair, a face more sweet,
Ne'er hath it been my lot to meet.

"And her modest answer and graceful air
Show her wise and good as she is fair.

"Would she were mine, and I to-day,
Like her, a harvester of hay:

"No doubtful balance of rights and wrongs,
Nor weary lawyers with endless tongues,

"But low of cattle and song of birds,
And health and quiet and loving words."

But he thought of his sisters proud and cold,
And his mother vain of her rank and gold.

So, closing his heart, the Judge rode on,
And Maud was left in the field alone.

But the lawyers smiled that afternoon,
When he hummed in court an old love-tune;

And the young girl mused beside the well,
Till the rain on the unraked clover fell.

He wedded a wife of richest dower,
Who lived for fashion, as he for power.

Yet oft, in his marble hearth's bright glow,
He watched a picture come and go;

And sweet Maud Muller's hazel eyes
Looked out in their innocent surprise.

Oft, when the wine in his glass was red,
He longed for the wayside well instead;

And closed his eyes on his garnished rooms
To dream of meadows and clover-blooms.

And the proud man sighed, with a secret pain,
"Ah, that I were free again!"

"Free as when I rode that day,
Where the barefoot maiden raked her hay."

She wedded a man unlearned and poor,
And many children played round her door.

But care and sorrow, and childbirth pain,
Left their traces on heart and brain.

And oft, when the summer sun shone hot

On the new-mown hay in the meadow lot,

And she heard the little spring brook fall
Over the roadside, through the wall,

In the shade of the apple-tree again
She saw a rider draw his rein.

And, gazing down with timid grace,
She felt his pleased eyes read her face.

Sometimes her narrow kitchen walls
Stretched away into stately halls;

The weary wheel to a spinet turned,
The tallow candle an astral burned,

And for him who sat by the chimney lug,
Dozing and grumbling o'er pipe and mug,

A manly form at her side she saw,
And joy was duty and love was law.

Then she took up her burden of life again,
Saying only, "It might have been."

Alas for maiden, alas for Judge,
For rich repiner and household drudge!

God pity them both! and pity us all,
Who vainly the dreams of youth recall.

**For of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these: "It might have been!"**

Ah, well! for us all some sweet hope lies
Deeply buried from human eyes;

And, in the hereafter, angels may
Roll the stone from its grave away!

Now, contrast that with this with Robert Frost's so-familiar poem, "The Road Not Taken."

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood

And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim
Because it was grassy and wanted wear,
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same.

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I marked the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less traveled by.
And that has made all the difference.¹²³

On the one hand:

For of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these: "It might have been!"

And on the other:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less traveled by.
And that has made all the difference.

I think the role of the elder is to look back at roads taken and not taken, to grieve what might have been and celebrate what was, then to tell our stories.

Film-makers, too, have probed this issue of self-forgiveness in the human spirit. Think of a popular film, shown every Christmas season, about choices made and their consequence: "It's a Wonderful Life" with James Stewart as the banker, George Bailey and James Tavers as Clarence, his guardian angel.

¹²³ This poem was written in 1916, before copyright laws, and needs no permission for use.

The stories are within us, and the stories outside of us help us to recognize them. To celebrate the good choices, but especially, to reconcile the not-so-good choices.

TWO: LEGACY

Closely tied to our choices is the issue of legacy. What have we done, or provided, or encouraged that has changed the world? Jews began to examine this more closely in the Middle Ages in what were called Ethical Wills, a concept that is becoming more popular today. For the Jewish community, it went back to the Hebrew Bible, as early as the patriarch Jacob telling his sons what to pursue: Judah, you will be a leader; Simeon and Levi, your anger will get you into trouble, Asher will be a great farmer and cook, Joseph will be blessed. All these his sons, to whom he has given much and he now sets them on their own way without his guidance.

So we, too, have our Ethical Wills, our legacy, and knowing what that is allows us to pass it on.

I have learned to encourage people to talk about their legacy when they're in the hospital. Despite genuine desire by care-givers to offer personal and humane healthcare, patients usually feel a bit like a slab of meat after they've been prodded, tested, operated upon, rehabilitated, fed and washed and so forth. We're told to leave our jewelry at home, our clothes are packed away in a locker and except for our bed number and our medical records, we lose our identity. I participate in that sometimes. Because of HIPAA regulations, we refer to patients as "543, bed 2" rather than Mr. Jones or Ms. Smith. So when I sit down with a patient or visitor, I ask about where they've been, who they are, and I seek to celebrate their legacy. Who was he in his working life and how did he change things? Did she love being a teacher? What is she most proud of?

THREE: FORGIVENESS OF OTHERS

And the third part of looking back is connected to the other two: forgiveness of others. Such burdens we carry with us when we do not forgive! And at our age, we shouldn't have to carry anything heavy! When we're young and someone does unto us something not forgivable – at least not at that time – we can put off that tough work of forgiveness for another day. But *we* no longer have that luxury. Not because we may die soon and it won't get done, but because we may die soon and why on earth would we cloud our remaining days by needing to forgive and not doing it. Forgiveness is a biggie in religion, of course, but it goes way beyond what faith requires of us. It is a basic spiritual need of human nature.

FOUR: WISDOM-MAKING

Which is what brings us to the present: What have we learned and what do we have to give back. I've called my Doctoral project "Wisdom-Making" because I think that's what we're about at this age. Yes, we've accumulated a lot of knowledge and experience, but knowledge and experience does not equal wisdom. We're all acquainted with people who know a lot, and have done a lot, who sadly, don't seem to have gleaned much wisdom out of it all. They've not done the work of wisdom-making. They're quite set in their knowledge and experience.

This is about meaning in our lives. After all we've said and done, lived and loved, chosen for better or worse, we now need to turn that around and around, study our life and make sense of it. Understand where we are in that Something Bigger outside of ourselves. *That* is wisdom-making. *That* is our spiritual job description.

FIVE: GIVING BACK

And finally, what now? Let me emphasize that while I'm a big advocate for advance directives and planning your own funeral – and I've done both – those are things that should be done and set aside. If your spirit needs to ponder and/or discuss what comes after death, do it. But when I say, "What now," I mean how do you use your wisdom? How do you enrich the world of which you are a significant part? Do you mentor? Do you write? Do you reminisce? What do you do with your wisdom? How do you nourish your spirit going forward?

MY WORKSHOP

I mentioned that this presentation tonight is the first part of my doctoral project. What I want to do now is to facilitate a six-session workshop for those who are interested in going further with me.

Here is my hope:

I'm looking for a few people, no more than 20, to commit to working with me over six sessions of about two hours (no more, maybe less) each. We will look at those areas I've just mentioned and you will have homework, mostly looking at your own spiritual life in the ways I've mentioned. It won't be a confessional group – you'll do that work privately – but we will examine together whether these theories – my own and others - have validity. At the end of six weeks, you may tell me I'm full of chicken soup and none of it makes any sense, or you may find you have learned a lot about yourself and together, we will develop a way for other people to do the same.

Because I love poetry and story and film, we will use that literature extensively. How do those stories that have touched our hearts impact on our own story? Why do certain poems

lodge somewhere in our gut when we hear them? Literature and narrative is, I think, the best way to explore our place in something larger than ourselves.

Because this project is part of my doctoral work, I do need a firm commitment to see it through with me and your reward is that you'll learn more about yourself, you'll be assisting a doctor-wanabe and you'll be helping to provide a way for elders to enrich their live. I'll teach you some of what I'm learning in my research in this area and together we'll create something new. I promise to do the lioness' share of the work.

After the six weeks is over, I'll interview individually those who are willing to do so, to go even deeper in mining your wisdom.

In my church, the Episcopal Church, there is a national commission on aging and they're engaged in several projects. One of them is to make better use of the wisdom of elders. I wrote to the woman in charge and asked if there was any project to help elders to understand their own wisdom, to look back, and inside, and make wisdom out of knowledge and experience. No. There wasn't. That's what I hope we can begin to do together.

Meanwhile, I hope all of you here tonight will fill out the brief questionnaire I left at the door so that I can begin to better understand from you the heart of Spirituality and Aging.

You've listened long to my voice. Now I'd like to hear from you . . .

APPENDIX C

NOTICES FOR PRESENTATIONS IN KENDAL AND MORNINGSIDES RETIREMENT AND HEALTH SERVICES NEWSLETTERS

Notices in Kendal and Morningside Retirement and Health Services newsletters:

“Wisdom-Making: A Spiritual Job Description for Elders”

What is it that defines the spiritual needs of mature adults? Do we have particular spiritual gifts to offer? What, in fact, *is* spirituality and can one be spiritual without being religious? What are the common themes in human spirituality that apply across cultural lines? This presentation will suggest answers to those questions and include an invitation to explore the subject further.

The Rev. Carole Johannsen, BCC is a board-certified healthcare chaplain and Coordinator of Pastoral Care at Phelps Memorial Hospital Center in Sleepy Hollow, NY. She is also a candidate for a Doctor of Ministry at New York Theological Seminary, focusing on spirituality and aging. In her personal experience and her work among other mature adults, she has become aware of the lack of attention to the unique spiritual needs of older adults. Her doctoral work is an attempt to offer a resource to meet those needs.

APPENDIX D

MATERIALS USED FOR PRESENTATIONS AND WORKSHOPS

A BRIEF QUESTIONNAIRE

(given to all attendees at both initial presentations)

1. What does “spirituality” mean to you?

2. Do you practice a religion? Yes No

_____ regular commitment?

_____ holidays and life passages only?

_____ historically affiliated but no longer connected?

_____ Other? (Please describe.)

3. Are you part of a spiritual or ethical community/group? If so, please describe.

4. What brought you here tonight? (Check all that apply.)

_____ Come every Monday regardless of subject.

_____ Particularly interested in Spirituality?

_____ Would like to know more.

_____ Other reason? (Please explain.)

5. What about this presentation/discussion was new information for you?
6. What was particularly provocative or challenging for you?
7. If you could request a Part II of this evening's topic, what would you like its focus to be?
8. Additional comments?

If you are interested in participating in the six-session workshop, please fill in the following:

Name _____

Telephone _____

Email _____

What time of day is best for you (morning, afternoon, evening)

What days are best for you? (Mon-Sat) _____

What days/times are you absolutely NOT available?

WISDOM-MAKING: A WORKSHOP IN SPIRITUALITY FOR ELDERS

The Rev. Carole Johannsen, BCC

Candidate for Doctor of Ministry

Initial Survey given to all workshop participants

Your Name _____ Your age _____

When writing about my research, I will not use anyone's actual name. If you would like to choose your own pseudonym, please do so here:

Marital status (circle one): married widowed divorced never married

Children: sons _____ daughters _____

Education:

College(s): _____

Undergraduate
major _____ Degree _____

Post-graduate
college(s) _____

Graduate
major _____ Degree _____

—

Graduate
major _____ Degree _____

—

Describe your career or professional life:

Religious History (if applicable)

Religion you were “born into” _____

Religion in which you were raised and educated _____

Life passages celebrated in which religion (baptism, bar/bat mitzvah, confirmation, etc.)

If you were part of one or more faith communities as an adult, please name them:

Are you part of a faith/ethical community now?

If so, please describe your involvement

If you are active in a faith/ethical community, what keeps you there?

___ shared beliefs ___ supportive community ___ habit

___ satisfying worship ___ obligation ___ educational
 opportunities

___ fear of leaving ___ not sure ___ clergy

other? _____

Spirituality

Do you consider yourself a spiritual person? Why or why not?

Is your spirituality connected to religion? _____

In what ways do you nurture your spiritual life?

___ meditation	___ closeness to nature	___ community
___ prayer	___ worship	___ reading/study
___ travel/pilgrimage hands	___ observing a Sabbath	___ working with your

other? _____

Can you identify spiritual experiences in your life? _____

Describe one such experience _____

Do you feel that you are on a spiritual journey? _____

Does your spirituality include a relationship with a “higher power”? _____

If so, please name or describe

Name three people (alive or dead, known personally or known about) who have influenced your spiritual life:

As you've aged, has your capacity for spiritual experience grown

___stronger? ___weaker? ___stayed the same?

Your spiritual life is:

___comforting ___isolating ___confusing
___strengthening ___satisfying ___sustaining
___full of meaning ___dry ___needing support
___dependent on religion ___non-existent ___vital and vigorous

Other? _____

To deepen your spiritual life, you would like to

___seek more quiet time in your life ___be with others who share your beliefs
___assist and support other people ___spend time with nature
___read about other people's spiritual experiences ___go on pilgrimage
___find a new way to worship more relevant to your life
___engage in dialogue with other faith/ethical traditions
___find new opportunities to study and learn

other? _____

Forgiveness of others is

___difficult for me
___necessary for me ___something I do regularly
___something I wish I could do ___something my faith demands
___something I'd rather not discuss ___important

other? _____

—

Forgiveness of one's self is often more difficult than forgiving others? Without specifying it here, can you think of three things for which you have resisted forgiving yourself?

If you were writing your autobiography, how important would your spiritual life be in the story?

What part of your present life are you most grateful for?

In your obituary, beyond the facts of your life, what would you like to have written about you?

What do you *hope* will happen to you after you die?

What question or comment would you add to this survey?

This workshop

My plans for this workshop is that we will work on:

- A spiritual autobiography: the great themes of our lives
- Forgiveness (of ourselves and others)
- Grief for what we've lost and celebration for the ways we've been blessed
- Legacy / Ethical Will – What we bring into the present
- Wisdom-making: What does it take?
- The meaning of our lives

What would *you* especially like to discuss / investigate / learn about in this workshop? (It need not fit into one of the categories above.)

WRITING YOUR SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

This is a way for you to look at your spiritual journey and growing awareness of *that of which you are a part*, rather than only *that which fulfills your needs and wants*.

How you tell your story will be as unique to you as your story. You may do it in several ways:

- Chronologically: This is where I was born, raised, educated, married, established a family and career, retired, etc. Be sure to note not only the facts of your history, but those elements of each stage that were especially important and influenced the next following stage(s).
- Your religious journey: Where did you start? What kept you there or bored you or pushed you to seek something different?
- Your relationships: Who were the people whose presence and influence transformed your life and how did they affect you?
- Your relationship with God / higher power? When did you first become aware of God? Did that relationship wax or wane over the years?
- All of the above.

Please write your story and if you are willing, give the written piece to me and I will make a copy and return it to you. That will help me to understand what you need from this group and the questions that are still open for you.

Using this story as a basis, we will explore the important themes in your life, still alive and well in your spirit today. It will also give you a basis to go back to bless the mistakes, celebrate the victories, resolve the grief, sort out your Bucket List, and carrying a lighter spiritual burden, go forward.

That's my hope for all of you, and I will join you in this trek.

The length of your story is yours to choose. When I wrote my own story for a pastoral training group, it was four pages, double-spaced. Yours can be shorter or longer, whatever you feel is best.

After you've written your story, begin to name the themes, the threads that continue through each stage of your life.

In our next session, we will discuss our spiritual journeys in the group, with a fixed amount of time for each person. Discuss as much or as little as you like. You can read what you wrote or you can discuss it using your written material as notes. In either case, you reveal as much or as little as you wish.

Ground rules for that:

- Each speaker tells his/her story without interruptions from others.
- When finished, the group may first ask informational questions.
- This is followed by responses to the story. (There is nothing worse than presenting something personal and getting no response! Please be prepared to listen and respond.)
- We will keep focus on the speaker and his/her story. Any comparison to our own stories should be kept until it is our time to present.
- What happens in Workshop, stays in Workshop!

FORGIVENESS

- Whether you need to forgive someone else or yourself, it's all about YOU. YOU are carrying the weight of grudges, anger, regret, guilt, shame.
- "Forgive and Forget" doesn't work.
- Forgiveness is a process, not an event.
- Rituals help.

Your task this week: take out those situations that require forgiveness from you and examine them closely.

First, make two lists:

- The people you need to forgive, and why.
- The ways you need to forgive yourself, and why.

These lists can be as long as you need them to be, and no one need see them other than you.

Second, in a quiet place where you can be undisturbed, take the items on your list, one at a time, and enter those situations. Imagine the younger person you were when each of those situations took place. Rehearse them in your mind. Be explicit to yourself about what actually happened, and your own complicity in the event. Live there for a few minutes, recapturing your emotions at the time.

Then, stepping away from your younger self, enter the situation with your present self. Talk to your younger self. Show him or her who you are now, how you have moved on despite the pain of that time.

Third, imagine a ritual where you can leave that painful situation behind. It can be as simple as writing some words on a piece of paper that you burn, visiting a gravesite and leaving something symbolic behind, a religious (confession, formal or informal; the singing of a particular hymn), treating yourself to an extravagant bouquet of flowers. Be creative.

Fourth, take notes on this process and come to class prepared to discuss the process of forgiveness and what else you need to continue or complete the process.

YOUR LEGACY

1. In your spiritual autobiography, what are the threads / themes that have been most exciting for you? These may NOT be the milestones, or the major turning points, but the experiences or relationships that you continue to carry with you because *something* in them lifted your spirit. Define that *something*! Make a list. What are the values inherent in these spirit-lifting events?
2. Looking back over the issues of forgiveness that have turned up for you, what did you learn from them? What would you teach yourself about each of those events if you could go back? What mistakes did you make that you would like to teach your descendants *not* to make.
3. Begin to articulate your legacy. What have you stood for? What have you fought for? What have you found absolutely unacceptable?

YOUR ETHICAL WILL

1. Like it or not, you are a model for those who come after you – relatives, beloved friends, etc. Your Ethical Will may influence what kind of model you will be. Begin by listing the people you would want to have copies of your Ethical Will.
2. Having begun to articulate your legacy – that which you leave behind (so far) – now begin to articulate what you would like to pass on.

Carole Johannsen
March 2012

Presenting. . . ME!

Some suggestions on how to let your death reflect your life.

When I am dying please attend to the following:

Surround me with

(books, flowers, family, my music, outside air, lavender, cats, laughter, a pile of grandkids on my bed, tail-wagging dogs, juicy gossip, photos, fine art, love)

This is what I want to

see _____

(a view of the Hudson, the mountains, family, the movies I missed, the people who've gone before)

This is what I want to hear, even if I can't

speak _____

(poetry read to me; recorded novels, preferably mysteries; big band music; the sound of birds, preferably loons, familiar voices; "M.A.S.H." reruns)

These are my fears about dying:

These are what I hope to experience after death:

Send me off this way:

Funeral or graveside service? (circle one)

Where would this
occur? _____

(funeral home, synagogue, church, at sea, by a lake,)

At this service, I would like this person to officiate/preach:

Music: (hymns, classical or pop music. Be specific!)

Special Effects:

Bury me wearing

The service should include

(a particular prayer book service; certain poems or readings; biblical passages; a eulogy by someone who loves me; silence; joy and humor; some of my own work)

NOTE: Of course, you should already have a will, a living will, a healthcare agent (proxy), power of attorney, chosen funeral director. Do that first (if not done) and give it to a trusted someone to hold.

AND ON WE GO . . .

You've written your spiritual autobiography, you've stepped into that painful land of forgiveness, you've celebrated your legacy and looked forward to your dying and death. And in all of these assignments, you've barely tiptoed into each area, barely begun. But you have a structure, a pattern for continuing this work.

But with some clearer vision backward and forward, the last task of this workshop is to assess the present so that each day may be as fulfilling to you—to the person you were created to be—as possible. Try to answer the following in no more than one or two sentences.

What theme stands out most clearly for you from your spiritual autobiography?

How can you incorporate that theme more effectively into your present life?

How will you proceed with your forgiveness issues?

What do you need to mourn?

Of what are you most proud in your life?

How do you offer that of which you are most proud to the people around you now?

How do you pass on that of which you are most proud to your descendants?

Imagine you are giving a State of the Spirit address, discussing *your* spirit. Envision your audience. Who would they be?

What would you say in your State of the Spirit address? (Remember, such addresses note both the present and the hoped-for future.)

What is your relationship (if any) to a Higher Power, God, Ground of Being, Creator?

What is it you most want to share with others in this time of your life?

Name two practical ways you can do that?

What is still in your Bucket List?

When you wrote your *ideal* obituary, what was in that which was not in your more formal New York Times obit?

What does your spirit need in order to feel content?

Decide on a next step to deepen your spiritual life. What would it be? (It must be something you can do today or tomorrow.)

Remember your bird? How does your choice of bird reflect on your spirituality?

In ONE (albeit, imperfect) sentence, state the meaning of your life.

APPENDIX E

DEMOGRAPHICS OF WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

DEMOGRAPHICS

KENDAL GROUP

Brendan: 78; Caucasian

Married;

Education:

Catholic seminary, Archdiocese of Boston

Boston College; B.A.; majored in scripture

Massachusetts State College: M.A.; Education

Trinity College, Hartford; M.A.; English

SUNY New Paltz: courses in English, Education, and Reading

Religion: Roman Catholic until marriage; Episcopal to present

Worked at teaching and investing

Retired

Cindy: 82; Caucasian; born in Germany; escaped Holocaust

Divorced; former husband deceased; no children

Religion: raised secular Jewish; currently Unitarian Universalist

Retired

Dorothy: Caucasian

Divorced; former husband deceased

Education:

Sarah Lawrence College; B.S. in Anthropology

M.S. Education; taught ESL

Retired

Julie: 90; Caucasian; born in Germany; lost family in the Holocaust

Divorced; then widowed

One stepson; one stepdaughter

Education:

Cambridge University (Berlin): two years; studied Latin and French

Commercial school for shorthand and typing

Religion: Lutheran; Jewish (during second marriage; presently agnostic

Retired; worked as dental hygienist, secretary, and for brokerage firm

Marisa: 84; Caucasian; born in France

Married; one son, three daughters

Education:

Elise in France (equivalent to two years of college)

Sorbonne, M.A. in English

Religion: born and raised French Huguenot; later various Protestant churches

Martin: 85; Caucasian

Married; one son; three daughters

Education:

All private schools, including Roxbury Latin School for high school

Harvard College

Harvard Business School, M.B.A.

Religion: Episcopal, then various Protestant churches

Retired from commercial banking

Sigrid: 83; Caucasian

Widowed; two children

Education: Cornell University

Religion: Congregational-Lutheran-Congregational

Worked at corporate information center, then as Director of Reproductive Choice agency

Retired

Stewart: 90; Caucasian

Married; children

Education:

Harvard College: Dual major, History and Science

Yale University: PhD, History of Theology

Attended Yale Divinity School;

Union Seminary; Bachelor of Divinity

Religion: Quaker

Retired professor

Terri: 83, Caucasian

Never married

Education:

Good Council College and Pace University: B.S. in Business Administration,
with as many literature courses as possible.

Retired; worked in book publishing

MORNINGSIDE GARDENS GROUP

Harriet: 85; African American; native New Yorker

Divorced; one son, one daughter

Education: high school

Religion: lifelong Roman Catholic

Retired from New York Telephone Company

Joanne: 64; Caucasian

Education: Barnard College; B.A., Russian major

Religion: Methodist (childhood); Episcopal (at present)

Presently unemployed

Nimrod: 75; Caucasian

Education: Swarthmore College: B.A., Engineering, then Biology major

Post-Graduate: Cornell, Columbia: Biochemical Genetics (no degree)

Religion: Atheist (various Protestant churches as a child)

Retired

Worked as science writer/editor; legal proofreader; art photographer, among other jobs

Retired

Simone: 84; Caucasian; born in the U.K.

Married; one adopted son

Education:

Teacher's College, Columbia; B.S.N. in Nursing

Certified Nurse Midwife; U.M.D.N.J.

Psychiatric Nursing; M.S.

Health Education; EdD

Religion: raised in Church of England; attends Riverside Church

Retired from nursing, midwifery, psychiatric nursing and health education and research.

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